

OXFORD STUDIES  
IN ANCIENT  
PHILOSOPHY

EDITOR: JULIA ANNAS

SUPPLEMENTARY VOLUME

1992

METHODS OF INTERPRETING  
PLATO AND HIS DIALOGUES

EDITED BY JAMES C. KLAGGE  
AND NICHOLAS D. SMITH

CLARENDON PRESS • OXFORD

1992

*Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP*  
*Oxford New York Toronto*  
*Delhi Bombay Calcutta Madras Karachi*  
*Petaling Jaya Singapore Hong Kong Tokyo*  
*Nairobi Dar es Salaam Cape Town*  
*Melbourne Auckland*  
*and associated companies in*  
*Berlin Ibadan*

*Oxford is a trade mark of Oxford University Press*

*Published in the United States*  
*by Oxford University Press, New York*

© *except where otherwise stated*  
*Oxford University Press 1992*

*All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,  
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,  
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without  
the prior permission of Oxford University Press*

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*  
*Data available*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

*Methods of interpreting Plato and his dialogues*/edited by James C. Klagge and Nicholas D. Smith.  
p. cm.—(Oxford studies in ancient philosophy)  
*Includes index.*  
*data available*

*ISBN 0 19 823951 3*

*Typeset by Joshua Associates Limited, Oxford*  
*Printed in Great Britain by*  
*Biddles Ltd, Guildford & King's Lynn*

## ADVISORY BOARD

Professor A. A. Long, *University of California at Berkeley*

Professor Martha Nussbaum, *Brown University*

Professor R. R. K. Sorabji, *King's College, University of London*

Professor Gisela Striker, *Harvard University*

Contributions and books for review should be sent to the Editor,  
Professor J. Annas, Dept. of Philosophy, 708 Philosophy Hall,  
Columbia University, New York, NY 10027, USA

Contributors are asked to observe the 'Notes for Contributors to  
Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy', printed at the end of this  
volume.



# CONTENTS

Editor's Prologue	I
JAMES C. KLAGGE	
Aristotle's Criticisms of Plato	13
GAIL FINE	
Plato the Sceptic	43
JULIA ANNAS	
Silence and Imitation in the Platonic Dialogues	73
L. A. KOSMAN	
Plato and the Erotics of Narrativity	93
DAVID M. HALPERIN	
Character and Meaning in Plato's <i>Hippias Minor</i>	131
MARY WHITLOCK BLUNDELL	
Analysing Plato's Arguments: Plato and Platonism	173
S. MARC COHEN AND DAVID KEYT	
Plato's Arguments and the Dialogue Form	201
MICHAEL FREDE	
A Maieutic View of Five Late Dialogues	221
KENNETH SAYRE	
Editor's Afterword: Platonic Scholars and Other Wishful Thinkers	245
NICHOLAS D. SMITH	
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	261
<i>Index Locorum</i>	263
<i>General Index</i>	274



# EDITOR'S PROLOGUE

JAMES C. KLAGGE

## 1. Introduction

THE following papers grew out of a conference on 'Methodological Approaches to Plato and his Dialogues' organized by the Philosophy Department of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in March 1988. The conference covered only some of the possible methodological approaches to Plato, and the following papers represent only some of the viewpoints presented on that occasion. Nevertheless, the papers included here cover a diverse set of topics, such as ancient interpretations of Plato, Plato as a literary figure, Plato's arguments and characters, and Plato's use of the dialogue form. Though much Platonic research has been carried out by analytic philosophers, they have been relatively unconcerned to reflect on methodological issues. This volume shows some analytic philosophers and some classicists at work on this task.

## 2. Philosophical writing styles and their significance

Most philosophy has been and continues to be written in expository prose: the author states and argues for (what he or she takes to be) particular truths, and possibly also responds to certain objections. None the less, there have been notable exceptions to this style, neither beginning nor ending with Plato—the oracular aphorisms of Heraclitus, Parmenides' poem, the poem of Lucretius, the *Confessions* of St Augustine, Descartes's *Meditations*, the dialogues of Berkeley and Hume, the varied works of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche's diatribes, the

© James C. Klagge 1992

In revising this prologue I have benefited, perhaps insufficiently, from comments by Bill Cobb, GailAnn Rickert, and Nick Smith.

plays and novels of Sartre, and Wittgenstein's *Investigations*.<sup>1</sup> We often forget the wide variety of styles that have been used.

Why have those writing about philosophical issues sometimes jettisoned the expository prose form? No doubt the reasons differ from author to author. But we may distinguish between those cases in which the non-standard style was designed simply to present the philosophical material in an interesting or attractive manner, and those cases in which the style was in some sense integral to or inseparable from the material. Practitioners of a non-standard style as merely a vehicle or container of philosophical content would (fairly uncontroversially) include Lucretius, Berkeley, and Hume. Practitioners of a non-standard style as (partially) embodying philosophical content would (perhaps more controversially) include Heraclitus, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche. It has not been easy for traditional philosophers to understand what it means for a style to be integral to philosophical material. We tend to think of literature as that realm in which style of writing is absolutely crucial to content, and philosophy as that realm in which style is irrelevant to content—or, rather, in which style should be as transparent or neutral as possible.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Kierkegaard

<sup>1</sup> Norman Malcolm reports: 'Wittgenstein once said that a serious and good philosophical work could be written that would consist entirely of *jokes* (without being facetious). Another time he said that a philosophical treatise might contain nothing but questions (without answers)' (*Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, 2nd edn. [Oxford, 1984], 27–8). In 1933 or 1934 Wittgenstein himself wrote: 'I think I summed up my attitude to philosophy when I said: philosophy ought really to be written only as a *poetic composition*. It must, as it seems to me, be possible to gather from this how far my thinking belongs to the present, future or past. For I was thereby revealing myself as someone who cannot quite do what he would like to be able to do' (*Culture and Value* [Chicago and Oxford, 1980], 24).

<sup>2</sup> One especially clear form of the contrast has been articulated by philosophy's most renowned contemporary writer of fiction, Iris Murdoch. Concerning philosophy and literature, she has said: 'These two branches of thought have such different aims and such different styles, and I feel that one should keep them apart from each other.' She goes on to say: 'Of course philosophers vary and some are more "literary" than others, but I am tempted to say that there is an ideal philosophical style which has a special unambiguous plainness and hardness about it, an austere unselfish candid style. A philosopher must try to explain exactly what he means and avoid rhetoric and idle decoration. Of course this need not exclude wit and occasional interludes; but when the philosopher is as it were in the front line in relation to his problem I think he speaks with a certain cold clear recognizable voice' ('Philosophy and Literature: Dialogue with Iris Murdoch', in B. Magee (ed.), *Men of Ideas* [New York, 1978], 265). This contrastive view has been most vigorously and recently opposed by Martha Nussbaum (e.g. *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* [Cambridge, 1986], ch. 1).



and Nietzsche have lain outside the mainstream of Anglo-American philosophy.

In some people's minds, reflection on Plato's dialogues calls into question the very distinction between literature and philosophy. Such reflection offers us the opportunity to rethink these concepts. No one thinks it is necessary, or even useful, to ask 'Why did Aeschylus write tragedies?' Why, then, should we wonder why Plato wrote dialogues?

When literature and philosophy are seen as aiming at the same goal—the shaping of human ideals—they can be made to compete with one another. In Plato's time this competition was already apparent in the (even then) 'ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry' (*Rep.* 607B). One realm in which this ancient quarrel remains pressing is in the interpretation of Plato's dialogues. Analytic philosophers have tended to view the dialogue form as little more than a (dispensable) vehicle for the conveyance of Plato's substantive philosophical theories. (This tendency has an ancient pedigree, which I shall examine in the next section, dating back to Plato's errant student, Aristotle.) Some others—including many classicists, political scientists, and some philosophers—have viewed the dialogue form as an essential ingredient in Plato's approach to philosophical issues.<sup>3</sup> According to this interpretation, reading Plato's attitude towards a philosophical issue out of a dialogue is no easier than reading Aristophanes' attitude towards a political issue out of a play.<sup>4</sup> If we insist on looking for Plato's views, we may be missing what is most significant about the dialogues.

If we understand the motives of the historical Socrates, the purpose of his conversations was never (simply) to convey philosophical truths. Rather than writing (or lecturing) for the general public, he focused on a particular person holding a particular set of beliefs. He claimed to know (almost) nothing. To what extent can we suppose that Plato's motives and concerns are those of the historical Socrates? Plato seems to be more willing to be dogmatic than the historical Socrates—but that is only indicated by the fact that the character 'Socrates' in the

<sup>3</sup> The first modern statement of the view that Plato's dialogue form is inseparable from the philosophical content seems to be by Friedrich Schleiermacher. See his *Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato*, trans. W. Dobson (New York, 1973), 14. (The introductions, along with translations of the dialogues into German, were originally published beginning in 1804.)

<sup>4</sup> For whatever help it might offer here, I note that Diogenes Laertius reports: 'Aristotle remarks that the style of the dialogues is half-way between poetry and prose' (3. 37, trans. R. D. Hicks).

middle dialogues is more dogmatic than what we think of as the historical Socrates. (Of course our picture of the historical Socrates derives mainly from Plato's dialogues.) Whether the character 'Socrates' is revelatory of Plato's motives is one of the central issues in question.

### 3. The historical evidence concerning Plato

Can we take Plato to be expounding his own philosophical and political theories in the dialogues, largely though not exclusively through the character 'Socrates'? This raises two separable issues: (1) Does Plato expound his own, as opposed to the historical Socrates', views? (2) Does Plato expound his own views, as opposed to not expounding *views* at all? The first question has long been discussed, and there is general, though not complete, agreement concerning it: in the 'early' dialogues the character 'Socrates' represents fairly accurately the historical Socrates, whereas in the 'middle' and 'later' dialogues the character 'Socrates' expounds the (evolving) views of Plato. The second question has generated controversy only relatively recently, and has not produced widespread agreement (indeed, it is a theme of this collection).

In some cases, perhaps the immortality of the soul, there is good evidence, internal to the dialogues themselves, to warn us away from inferring anything about Plato's views from the statements of the character 'Socrates'. In such cases it seems best to withhold judgement concerning Plato's own view, and instead to take Plato's dialogues to be raising the issue for, and subjecting it to, serious but inconclusive consideration.

On other issues, however, perhaps the theory of the Forms or the nature of the ideal state, there does not seem to be significant internal tension (except what could be accounted for by the evolution of Plato's thinking), and the question arises whether we should take these views expounded by the character 'Socrates' to be Plato's own—despite the fact that Plato never endorses them in his own voice, *in propria persona*, in the dialogues.

What evidence, if any, is there to help resolve the second question, evidence which is external to the dialogues themselves? In fact there is some such external evidence, which may for convenience be divided into four kinds:

1. Historical evidence concerning Plato's activities.
2. Statements allegedly made by Plato *in propria persona* about his own views.
3. Ancient testimony concerning Plato's views that has some basis external to the dialogues.
4. Ancient literary genres that may have influenced or constrained Plato's writing.

I shall briefly sketch some evidence that can be gleaned from these sources, but it must be acknowledged from the outset that it is limited and controversial.

1. The historical evidence that we have concerning Plato's activities comes primarily from the letters that were traditionally ascribed to him, though Plutarch seems to provide some independent information and confirmation.<sup>5</sup> Scholars have focused their attention primarily on the *Seventh Letter*. In it Plato is described as first journeying to Sicily, where he met Dion, when he was about forty years old. Dion was interested in philosophy and became convinced by Plato's political ideals. According to Plutarch the two together tried to convert the tyrant Dionysius I to philosophy. This attempt was unsuccessful, and, under circumstances that remain unclear, Plato was sent away. After the death of Dionysius I, some twenty years later, Dion sparked an interest in philosophy in the new ruler Dionysius II. Plato was then invited by Dionysius II to return to Sicily to be his tutor and, as Dion and Plato thought, to carry out the programme of the *Republic*. After considerable hesitation because of his scepticism concerning the possibility of success of such a venture, Plato eventually consented and came to Sicily. The venture did indeed fail, but it is clear that Plato is represented as hoping to institute in real life some sort of ideal society, presumably along the lines he had described in the *Republic*. If this is accurate, it may justify us in taking seriously the idea that in the *Republic* Plato is making genuinely political proposals. At 502B Plato makes Socrates ask: 'And surely one such individual, if his city obeyed him, would be sufficient to bring about all the measures which now seem incredible?' and Adeimantus respond: 'He would be sufficient'.

The authenticity of Plato's letters was never seriously disputed until the nineteenth century. Now it is widely acknowledged, however, that

<sup>5</sup> My account of the *Seventh Letter* derives mainly from Ludwig Edelstein's monograph, *Plato's Seventh Letter* (Leiden, 1966). The evidence from Plutarch comes from his *Life of Dion*.

most of them are spurious, having been written after Plato's death. The *Seventh Letter* has received the most vigorous defence, but even it is not uncontroversially authentic. Yet even if the letter is judged to be spurious, it might still serve as legitimate evidence concerning Plato's activities.

Contemporary scholars who reject the *Seventh Letter* as spurious have done so on grounds that cast no doubt on the main course of events as I have described them above. What is suspicious in the letter is the style of writing, the writer's excessively negative assessment of Dionysius' character, his too positive assessment of Dion's, and his characterization of Plato as a vigorous political activist. These attitudes can best be understood as apologetic projections on to past events by members of the Academy after Plato's death. But there seems to be no doubt that the author was writing about events that took place basically as described.

Though Plutarch's account of events seems largely derived from the *Seventh Letter*, it differs from it in some of its judgements, and adds some details not found in the letter. These deviations suggest that it may depend on some sources independent of the letter, and so constitute some confirmation of the broad outline of events.<sup>6</sup>

So even a spurious *Seventh Letter*, along with Plutarch, may provide some historical evidence, independent of the dialogues, that Plato meant the character 'Socrates' to be articulating something like Plato's own political ideals.

2. The largest body of extant statements seemingly made by Plato *in propria persona* concerning his own philosophical views comes from the *Seventh Letter*. Yet, as I indicated above, the authorship of the letter is very controversial. If we assume the letter is spurious, written by a member of the Academy after Plato's death, then it could at best constitute the third kind of historical evidence, which I discuss below. On the other hand, even if the letter is authentic it might still require interpretation in the manner of the dialogues. The letter purports to represent Plato speaking *in propria persona*, but it does not follow that he is doing so. Were a character purporting to be Aristophanes to appear in the parabasis of a play written by Aristophanes, even if the character were played by Aristophanes, we could not simply assume that the character reported Aristophanes' own views about anything. So too, if a character named 'Plato' had spoken in any of the dialogues,

<sup>6</sup> This is argued by Edelstein at pp. 41, 57-9.

all the same issues would arise concerning the relationship between his statements and the views of the author of the dialogue himself. (This sort of issue is explored by Michael Frede in his contribution to this volume.)

The only other evidence we have concerning Plato's statements about his own philosophical views is fragmentary reports concerning Plato's infamous lecture 'On the Good'. The fact that Plato gave such a lecture at all already distinguishes him from his teacher Socrates, who would never have been so presumptuous. On the other hand, the audience certainly did not get what it came for—advice on a silver platter. Aristoxenus, a pupil of Aristotle's, reports the following:

This, as Aristotle was always saying, was the experience of most of those who heard Plato's lecture 'On the Good'. Each of them attended on the assumption that he would hear about one of the recognized human goods—such as wealth, health, strength, and in general some marvellous happiness. When Plato's lectures turned out to be about mathematics—numbers, geometry, astronomy—and, to crown all, about the thesis that the good is one, it seemed to them, I fancy, something quite paradoxical; and so some people despised the whole thing, while others criticized it.<sup>7</sup>

According to Simplicius the lecture was, however, attended by some philosophical associates of Plato—among them Speusippus, Xenocrates, Aristotle, Heraclides, and Hestiaeus—who reported in general outline that Plato maintained that the first principles of all things, including the Forms and sensible things, were the One and the indefinite dyad (also called the unlimited or the great and small). However, they also reported that the lecture was delivered in an enigmatic style.<sup>8</sup> Aristotle also attributes similar views to Plato in the *Metaphysics*.

Generations of scholars have had difficulty identifying precisely these doctrines in Plato's dialogues and have concluded that either Plato's own views (on this matter) were never revealed in the dialogues (the 'Esoteric View' that Plato revealed some of his views only orally),<sup>9</sup> or else Aristotle is an unreliable guide to understanding Plato (an issue I shall address below).

<sup>7</sup> Aristox. *Harm.* 2. 30–1; collected in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. J. Barnes [Barnes], ii (Princeton, 1984), 2397.

<sup>8</sup> Simpl. *In Phys.* 151. 6–11, 453. 25–30; collected in Barnes, ii, 2398, 2399.

<sup>9</sup> A summary of our knowledge of Plato's lecture and a conjecture as to its circumstances and motivation are offered by K. Gaiser, 'Plato's Enigmatic Lecture "On the Good"', *Phronesis*, 25 (1980), 5–37.

If the esoteric view of Plato were correct, then the dialogues would constitute something more akin to philosophical exercises for initiation into the kinds of problems and the style of thinking that interested Plato. However, Kenneth Sayre has recently argued that the allegedly esoteric views can be found in a somewhat modified form in the *Philebus*.<sup>10</sup> Yet Sayre does not conclude that the character 'Socrates' is a mere mouthpiece for Plato. Rather, he holds that Plato's views—divulged in the *Lecture on the Good*—must be gleaned from the dialectical and dramatic structure of the dialogue as well as from the arguments of 'Socrates'. (Sayre elaborates this interpretative strategy in his contribution to this volume.)

3. There is considerable ancient testimony concerning Plato's views. The key questions are how trustworthy the testimony is, and whether it is independent of the dialogues. Since Plato formed the Academy, where a number of philosophers worked (with Plato?) on philosophical issues, it seems reasonable to assume that these members of the Academy had an understanding of Plato's views that has some basis independent of the dialogues themselves. Foremost among these Academicians was Aristotle, who studied there for some twenty years. And Aristotle is by far the most significant source of ancient testimony concerning Plato's views.

In discussing Plato's views Aristotle regularly attributes to him views found in the dialogues and articulated by their leading characters—for example, the theory of the Forms and the political proposals of the *Republic* and the *Laws*. In assessing Aristotle's attributions two issues must be distinguished: (1) How accurately do Aristotle's attributions match the positions articulated by the leading character of the dialogue in question, and what are we to make of any differences that we discern between the two? (This issue is discussed in Gail Fine's paper.) (2) Can we trust Aristotle when he attributes to Plato anything like views articulated by the character 'Socrates' in the dialogues? It is the latter question that concerns me here.

Even if Aristotle is an unreliable and polemical interpreter of his predecessors in details, can we really accuse him of complete misrepresentation of Plato's intentions? Grounds for suspicion might be found in Aristotle's interpretation of Heraclitus. Aristotle prosaically interprets Heraclitus as rejecting the law of non-contradiction and as proposing that the material *aitia* of all things is fire. Indeed, these

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Sayre, *Plato's Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved* (Princeton, 1983).

deflationary interpretations of Heraclitus have influenced the Western philosophical understanding of Heraclitus ever since. Yet another reading of what little we have from Heraclitus suggests that he was not making such pedestrian assertions at all, but was trying to be provocative and to see deeply into difficult issues. Could Aristotle have seen this and, still, wilfully deformed Heraclitus' oracular aphorisms for his own purposes? If Aristotle could do this to Heraclitus, it is not inconceivable that he could do the same to Plato.

It seems to me that in that case the offence to Aristotle's own mentor would be too great and unforgivable.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, so far as we know no dissenting tradition of Platonic interpretation seems to have sprung up in opposition to Aristotle. (The Sceptical interpretation of Plato, discussed by Julia Annas, has no claim to any authority that is independent of the dialogues themselves.) And even if the *Seventh Letter* is spurious, it at least provides early ancient reinforcement of Aristotle's interpretation of the dialogues as presenting Plato's own views concerning central philosophical and political issues.<sup>12</sup>

4. Plato was not the only person in fourth-century Athens who wrote dialogues, nor, for that matter, was he the only writer of Socratic dialogues (in the sense of dialogues in which Socrates was the main characters).<sup>13</sup> If there were conventions regarding the understanding of these dialogues, that might give some clue as to the intention with which Plato wrote his Socratic dialogues.

Unfortunately, this tactic offers little assistance. Besides Plato, we know of three others who wrote Socratic dialogues—Xenophon, Aeschines, and Antisthenes.<sup>14</sup> We know very little about the dialogues of Aeschines and Antisthenes. They seem not to have had any biographical purpose (regarding Socrates), but to have been written with the apologetic purpose of defending Socrates against the prejudice that he was responsible for the corruption of Alcibiades.

We know more about Xenophon's Socratic dialogues because we

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *NE* I. 6, 1096<sup>a</sup>11–16.

<sup>12</sup> For later ancient affirmation see D.L. 3. 51–2, who takes account of the Sceptical interpretation.

<sup>13</sup> Athenaeus (9, 505<sup>c</sup>; collected in Barnes, ii. 2419) cites Aristotle as testifying to the existence of at least one writer of dialogues (though not, apparently, Socratic dialogues) before Plato—Alexamenus. For more on this issue see Michael W. Haslam, 'Plato, Sophron, and the Dramatic Dialogue', *Bulletin of the Institute for Classical Studies*, 19 (1972), 17–38.

<sup>14</sup> My account of non-Platonic Socratic dialogues derives from G. C. Field, *Plato and his Contemporaries: A Study in Fourth Century Life and Thought*, 3rd edn. (London, 1967).

have some of them—e.g. *Memorabilia*, *Symposium*, and *Oeconomicus*. They seem to have been written with a variety of purposes. The *Memorabilia* is apologetic without being clearly biographical. The *Symposium* seems to be nothing more than a naturalistic slice of life. And the *Oeconomicus* seems to present some common views on husbandry, first through the character of ‘Socrates’ and then through another character.

By far the greatest evidence we have concerning the nature of Socratic (or any) dialogues derives from Plato’s own works, the interpretation of which is the centre of this controversy. In any case, we know of no standard or conventional purpose governing the writing of Socratic dialogues in fourth-century Athens that might have put constraints on what Plato could be understood to be trying to do in his compositions. (Frede’s paper explores the understanding of the dialogue form in later interpretative traditions.)

Plato does, however, seem to have been influenced by another related genre of literature, the mime. According to Diogenes Laertius, ‘Plato, it seems, was the first to bring to Athens the mimes of Sophron, which had been neglected, and to draw characters in the style of that writer; a copy of the mimes, they say, was actually found under his pillow.’<sup>15</sup> Mimes, like Plato’s dialogues, were concerned with character and situation rather than action. But unlike the dialogues, their subject-matter was the events of everyday life rather than the beliefs of individuals.

It is hard to tell what, if anything, to make of this connection. Concerning the relationship between mimes and Socratic dialogues, Aristotle makes the following puzzling remarks:

There is further an art which imitates by language alone, and one which imitates by metres. . . . These forms of imitation are still nameless today. We have no common name for a mime of Sophron or Xenarchus and a Socratic conversation; and we should still be without one even if the imitation in the two instances were in . . . verse. . . . Even if a theory of medicine or physical philosophy be put forth in a metrical form, it is usual to describe the writer in this way [as a poet]; Homer and Empedocles, however, have really nothing in common apart from their metre; so that if one of them is to be called a poet, the other should be termed a physicist rather than a poet. (*Po.* 1, 1447<sup>a</sup>28–<sup>b</sup>19)

Aristotle seems to be saying that although mimes and dialogues have similar forms, their purpose or content is so different that we

<sup>15</sup> D.L. 3. 18. See also the discussion by Haslam (above, n. 13).



should keep them distinct. Thus, it is just as well that they have no common name. Though the issue remains murky, it seems reasonable to see mime as influencing Plato's style of presentation of philosophical issues, without that style becoming an essential ingredient in those issues.

These, then, are the four main types of historical evidence that might be brought to bear in interpreting Plato's dialogues. They seem to reduce to two main issues: Can we trust the author of the *Seventh Letter* to have truthfully represented Plato's relationship to and interest in the political situation in Sicily? And can we trust Aristotle to have truthfully represented the main thrust, even if not the details, of Plato's own views concerning the Forms and ideal political organization? I have not by any means discussed either of these issues in the depth they deserve. Rather, I want to raise them as worthy of attention and to sketch some plausible answers to them. In my opinion the evidence establishes a slight presumption in favour of the view that some of the main philosophical and political positions articulated by the leading characters in the dialogues do indeed represent the views of Plato himself.

However, since the historical evidence is weak and scarce, and since it is too vague to form the basis of any detailed interpretation, a final assessment of these issues must include an examination of the evidence internal to the dialogues themselves—dramatic aspects, literary form, characterizations, and arguments. We should therefore turn to the papers collected in this volume, and the dialogues themselves, before making any confident judgements about Plato's beliefs or his intentions in writing the dialogues.

#### 4. The meaning of texts

Even if it were established that Plato did intend the main character in his dialogues to represent his own views, literary critics are fond of warning of the 'Intentional Fallacy': the mistake of assuming that what a work of art means is identical with what the artist intended it to mean.

Avoidance of this assumption can lead in either of two apparently very different directions. On the one hand it can lead to so-called analytic interpretations of Plato, in which Plato is seen as a co-worker on the cutting edge of contemporary analytic philosophy. (This

'prospective' view of interpretation is elaborated and defended by Cohen and Keyt in their contribution to this volume.) On the other hand it can lead to post-structuralist, or so-called deconstructionist, interpretations of Plato, in which the meaning of Platonic texts is created by the interpreter. In fact, however, analytic interpretations are a form of creation (as Cohen and Keyt acknowledge), and so an example of deconstructionism. But they are a special example, in which the standards for evaluating the creation are the (allegedly) rigorous standards of contemporary analytic philosophy. It is harder to specify what the standards are, or whether there are standards, for the evaluation of creative literary interpretations. It is not too surprising that philosophers, who tend to be serious-minded, shy away from this open-ended sort of enterprise, and literary critics, who tend to be more free-spirited, gravitate towards it.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps it could be said that deconstructionists, including analytic interpreters, are more interested in what worth we can read into Plato's texts than in what meaning he may have put into them.

Some of the tension that has arisen over the interpretation of Plato is fuelled by the suspicion that others have a hidden agenda behind their approach, and could be eased if we were clearer, both with ourselves and with others, about why we read and reflect on Plato's work. It is not enough to say, with Sir Edmund Hilary, 'because it is there'. If we articulated and confessed our motives, we might come to feel less at odds with one another.

*Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University*

<sup>16</sup> My distinction between 'serious-minded' and 'free-spirited' derives from Ernest Sosa's paper 'Serious Philosophy and Freedom of Spirit', *Journal of Philosophy*, 84 (1987), 707-26.

# ARISTOTLE'S CRITICISMS OF PLATO

GAIL FINE

A universal as a substance is a peculiarly repugnant notion.<sup>1</sup>

IN assessing Aristotle's criticisms of Plato's theory of Forms, we are often asked to choose between the horns of the following dilemma: either Aristotle interprets Plato correctly, in which case the theory of Forms is incoherent; or else the theory of Forms is invulnerable to his criticisms, in which case Aristotle simply misunderstands Plato. Both horns of this dilemma are unattractive. It would be unattractive to have to conclude that Plato's theory of Forms—a central part of his philosophy and one of the great metaphysical constructs in the history of philosophy—is incoherent; and it would also be unattractive to have to conclude that Aristotle misunderstood Plato, with whom, after all, he studied for nearly twenty years.

Of course, sometimes unattractive things happen to be the case. The mere fact that both horns of the dilemma are unattractive is not sufficient reason to reject them both. And if the dilemma is exhaustive, then we have no option but to be impaled on one of its two horns. Fortunately, however, the dilemma is not exhaustive. For it rests on the false assumption that Aristotle aims to record and criticize arguments to which Plato is straightforwardly committed. But this is not generally Aristotle's strategy. Sometimes he takes an impressionistic and vague Platonic claim, and provides one literal and natural reading of it, which he then proceeds to attack. At other times, he completes an incomplete Platonic argument in a given

© Gail Fine 1992

Earlier versions of this paper were read at a conference on Plato's methodology, held at Virginia Polytechnic Institute; at MIT; at the University of Michigan; and at the University of Colorado. I am grateful to the audiences on these occasions for helpful comments. I would especially like to thank Dan Devereux (my commentator in Virginia), David Brink, and Gisela Striker for helpful written comments and helpful discussion, and Nicholas White and Christopher Shields for helpful discussion.

<sup>1</sup> D. M. Armstrong, *Universals: An Opinionated Introduction* (Boulder, Colo., 1989), 74.

way—generally with the aid of Aristotelian assumptions that Plato probably does not accept. Aristotle aims to record, not Plato's clear intentions and commitments, but a reconstructed version of Platonism that he believes is a natural reconstruction, and one that relies on assumptions he takes to be true.

Aristotle's criticisms often succeed against these reconstructed arguments. But Plato is free to reply that he is not committed to them—that he intends his impressionistic language in some other way, or rejects the Aristotelian assumptions intruded into them. In offering Plato this reply, however, we plainly need not conclude that Aristotle misunderstands Plato. Rather, he challenges us to say what Plato means if not the literal reading he proposes; and he challenges us to say whether Platonism is worth holding on to if it is incompatible with the assumptions he builds into the arguments he records. Of course, we may in the end decide that Aristotle's metaphysics is to be preferred, or that Plato's impressionistic language admits of no satisfactory literal interpretation. But such a decision should result from deep reflection, not from the mistaken thought that Aristotle straightforwardly shows that the theory of Forms is internally incoherent. Both Plato and Aristotle deserve better than that.

This reply to the dilemma also provides a solution to the so-called 'riddle of the early Academy', which, according to Cherniss, 'is epitomized in the discrepancy between Aristotle's account of Plato's theory of ideas and that theory as we know it from Plato's writings'.<sup>2</sup> Various hypotheses have been advanced to explain this alleged discrepancy. Some have argued that at least some of Aristotle's accounts of Plato's theory of Forms aim to record, not the thought of the dialogues we possess, but of Plato's so-called unwritten doctrines. Others have argued that what are sometimes thought to be Aristotle's accounts of Plato are in fact accounts of others in the Academy. Still others have argued that Aristotle has Plato in mind, but misinterprets him.

No one of these hypotheses needs to be correct for every passage in which Aristotle describes some theory of Forms. Perhaps he sometimes describes Plato's unwritten doctrines, and sometimes views of others in the Academy; and perhaps sometimes he just gets Plato wrong. Too often, however, scholars have felt compelled to advance one of these hypotheses, because they have not properly understood

<sup>2</sup> *The Riddle of the Early Academy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1945), 31.

Aristotle's strategies in interpreting Plato's dialogues. Once we are clear about Aristotle's style of interpretation—of pressing impressionistic language in one straightforward way, and of filling in incomplete arguments with the aid of Aristotelian assumptions—many passages that did not seem relevant to the dialogues become relevant to them. The way in which they are relevant, however, does not require us to say either that Aristotle misinterprets Plato or that he clearly provides a devastating criticism of him.

Such, in broad outline, is my reply both to the dilemma and to the riddle just sketched. Here I shall try to defend its plausibility by exploring four related Aristotelian criticisms of Plato. They are all to be found in his essay *Peri ideōn* (*On Ideas*), portions of which are preserved by Alexander in his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, A.<sup>3</sup> Three of the criticisms are directed against the Argument from Relatives. The fourth occurs later in the *Peri ideōn*, but it is related in interesting ways to the first criticism.

I shall not explore the complicated details of the Argument from Relatives (AR) here. For present purposes it is sufficient to note that it argues, among other things, that there is a Form of equal which has at least the following features: it is non-sensible; it is fully or strictly (*kuriōs*) equal; it is a paradigm of which sensible equals are copies or likenesses; and indeed sensible equals are equal precisely in virtue of being likenesses of the paradigmatic Form of equal. AR's Platonic credentials seem firm. At least, at *Phaedo* 74 Plato likewise argues that there must be a non-sensible Form of equal; and his reasons match AR's.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> I generally use D. Harlfinger's text of the *Peri ideōn*, in W. Leszl's *Il 'de Ideis' di Aristotele e la teoria platonica delle idee* (Florence, 1975); but, where necessary, I use M. Hayduck's text instead, as printed in *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, i (Berlin, 1891). Although it is clear that the first three objections I discuss are from the *Peri ideōn*, there is some dispute about the fourth; see n. 36 below.

<sup>4</sup> A similar verdict is reached by G. E. L. Owen in 'A Proof in the *Peri Ideon*' ['Proof'], in M. Nussbaum (ed.), *Logic, Science and Dialectic [LSD]* (Ithaca, NY, 1986), ch. 6. Although Owen and I agree that AR is based on *Phaedo* 74, our detailed interpretations of both AR and *Phaedo* 74 differ significantly. Some of these differences emerge below, but I shall not develop them in any detail here. I discuss some of them in 'Owen's Progress', *Philosophical Review*, 97 (1988), 373–99, esp. sects. II and III.

# 1. Aristotle's first objection: No substance is a relative

Alexander records Aristotle as objecting to AR as follows:

This argument, he says, establishes ideas even of relatives (*kai tōn pros ti*). At least, the present proof has been advanced in the case of equal, which is a relative. But they used to say that there were no ideas of relatives because while ideas, being for them kinds of substances (*ousiai*), subsist in themselves (*huphestanai kath' hauta*), relatives have their being in their relation to one another. (83. 22–6)

Alexander adverts to the same objection a bit later on, when he says:

Further, he made this opinion common ground when he spoke of it as his own, saying 'of which things we deny that there is an in itself (*kath' hauta*) genus', speaking of 'genus', instead of 'reality' or 'nature', if a relative is indeed like an appendage, as he says elsewhere. (83. 30–3)

The argument may be set out as follows:

- (1) Forms are substances (*ousiai*).
- (2) If  $x$  is a substance,  $x$  subsists in itself ( $x$  is *kath' hauta*).
- (3) Therefore, Forms subsist in themselves.
- (4) If  $x$  is a relative (*pros ti*),  $x$  has its being in relation to another relative.
- (5) If  $x$  has its being in relation to another relative, then  $x$  does not subsist in itself.
- (6) Therefore, no Form is a relative.
- (7) The Form of equal is a relative.
- (8) Not both: (6) and (7).

AR is thus alleged to generate Forms in unwanted cases; in particular, it generates Forms of relatives which, Aristotle says, Plato does not want. But how are we to interpret Aristotle's claim? Plainly he cannot mean that Plato explicitly denies the existence of Forms of relatives.<sup>5</sup> For AR uses 'equal', a relative predicate, as its key example

<sup>5</sup> Dan Devereux has suggested to me that Aristotle does not have Plato in mind, but only later Platonists who did explicitly deny the existence of Forms of relatives; Aristotle's point is that such Platonists, in contrast to Plato himself, could not use AR as an argument for Forms. While this interpretation cannot be decisively rejected, I do not think it is necessary. Certainly 'they used to say' is no evidence in its favour. Aristotle often uses 'they' when it is clear that he has Plato in mind; and he often claims that 'they used to say'  $p$  when he means, not that they explicitly said  $p$ , but that they are committed to  $p$ .

of a predicate demanding a Form; and, as I have said, AR aims to capture *Phaedo* 74, which likewise argues that there must be a Form of equal. Aristotle is rather objecting that Plato's explicit acknowledgment of Forms of relatives is incompatible with another key belief of his, that all Forms are substances and so exist in themselves. These two beliefs are incompatible, Aristotle urges, because no relative can exist in itself; relatives 'have their being in their relation to one another' (83.25-6).<sup>6</sup>

I begin by asking why Aristotle believes that the Form of equal is both a relative and a substance. I then ask why, and with what justification, he claims that no relative can be a substance.

Aristotle records his view of Plato's reasons for taking Forms to be substances (i.e. basic beings) in his accounts of the flux argument in *Metaph.* A 6, M 4, and M 9. There he correctly suggests that Plato takes Forms to be substances because they satisfy such important criteria for substantiality as being fundamental for knowledge and definition.<sup>7</sup> All Forms are substances, then, simply *qua* being Forms; substantiality attaches to Forms simply because they are Forms, irrespective of the particular Forms they are.

Although the Form of equal is a substance that exists in itself simply *qua* being a Form, it is a relative *qua* being the particular Form it is, *qua* being the Form corresponding to the predicate 'equal'. It seems plain that the Form of equal is viewed not only as corresponding to the predicate 'equal', but also as itself being equal. No doubt this is because Aristotle believes that Plato is committed to self-predication (SP): any Form of F is itself F.<sup>8</sup> So in countenancing a Form of equal, Plato, in Aristotle's view, is committed to treating it as being equal.

On the account I have proposed, the Form of equal is a substance that exists in itself *qua* being a Form; but it is equal, and so a relative, *qua* being the particular Form it is. Call predicates that attach to

<sup>6</sup> In the second and third objections Aristotle mentions a second way in which AR generates too many Forms: it generates two Forms corresponding to some predicates; yet Plato believes that for any predicate for which there is a Form, there is just one Form. I explore these objections below. There is some dispute about what Aristotle means by 'relative' here. I shall assume, with Alexander, that Aristotle has in mind entities falling into his category of relatives. For a different interpretation see Owen, 'Proof'.

<sup>7</sup> I discuss the substantiality of Forms, and Aristotle's account of the flux argument, in more detail in 'Plato and Aristotle on Form and Substance', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philosophical Society*, 209 (1983), 23-47; and in 'Separation, Predication and Substances in Ancient Philosophy', 2 (1984), 31-87.

<sup>8</sup> I ask how best to interpret SP below.



Forms in virtue of their being Forms 'A-level predicates'; and call predicates that attach to Forms in virtue of their being the Forms they are 'B-level predicates'.<sup>9</sup> Using this terminology, we can say that Aristotle is offering a 'two-level paradox', one that alleges contradiction between an A- and a B-level predicate. But, it is sometimes thought, two-level paradoxes are *prima facie* suspect.<sup>10</sup> For example, initially it might sound impossible for something to be both one and many; so if it could be shown that a given Form is both one and many, there might seem to be a serious difficulty. However, if it turns out that the Form is one, in so far as it is one Form, and many in so far as it is the Form corresponding to the predicate 'many', then the seeming difficulty disappears. Here, then, a two-level paradox is not genuinely troubling on reflection.

However, even if some two-level paradoxes are suspect, others raise genuine difficulties; in some cases it would be problematical if something were F in virtue of being a Form, and not F in virtue of being the Form it is. To illustrate with an example not about Forms: if I say that all policemen have to be over 5' 6", and that Jones is only 5' 4", then Jones cannot be a policeman—even though it is not *qua* being a policeman that he fails to be over 5' 6".

What about the present two-level paradox? Would there be a genuine difficulty if it could be shown that the Form of equal is a substance *qua* being a Form, and a relative *qua* being the Form corresponding to the predicate 'equal'? I think there would be—given Aristotle's assumption that nothing can be both a substance and a relative. For in saying that all Forms are supposed to be substances, Aristotle is imposing criteria that anything that counts as a Form must satisfy—this is like saying that all policemen must be over 5' 6". In his view, if something is a relative, it cannot satisfy those criteria—this is like saying that Jones cannot be a policeman if he is only 5' 4". This paradox cannot be dissolved simply by noting that it is a two-level paradox.

If the present two-level paradox is not suspect simply in virtue of being a two-level paradox, then Aristotle's argument is valid. The only

<sup>9</sup> The terminology is Owen's; see 'Dialectic and Eristic in the Treatment of Forms', *LSD*, ch. 12. In contrast to me, Owen believes that the argument involves only a 'one-level paradox', involving two B-level predicates. Presumably he finds this attractive at least partly because he finds two-level paradoxes suspect.

<sup>10</sup> 'Dialectic and Eristic', 226.



questions to be raised, then, are whether it correctly captures Plato's views, and whether it is sound.

Aristotle seems right to say both that Plato views all Forms as substances, and also (assuming SP) that the Form of equal is a relative. He also seems right to suggest that of the two allegedly conflicting claims—that all Forms are substances and that some Forms are relatives—Plato would prefer to jettison the second. No explanation of this suggestion is given here, but presumably Aristotle believes that it is more important to Plato to safeguard the substantiality of Forms than to countenance any particular Form.

But why does Aristotle believe that nothing can be both a substance and a relative? His reason for the claim is that every substance exists in itself, whereas relatives 'have their being in their relation to one another'. But what is it for something to 'exist in itself' or for relatives to have their being in relation to one another? Unfortunately, it is not at all easy to understand Aristotle's views on these matters.

For something to exist in itself (or in its own right, *kath'hauto*) is for it to enjoy some sort of independence; but the independence could be existential or definitional. I am inclined to believe that Aristotle has definitional independence of some sort in mind here. For when he wishes to speak of existential independence—i.e. separation—he typically uses some form or cognate of *chōrizein* instead.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the different varieties of being *kath'hauto* described in *Post. An.* 1. 4—in passages that are quite similar to our context—seem to involve definitional, not existential, claims. I shall therefore begin by assuming that the feature special to substances, which allegedly does not attach to relatives, involves some sort of definitional independence. However, later I shall briefly consider the force of Aristotle's argument if it is interpreted in terms of existential independence instead.

What sort of definitional independence might be at issue? One possibility is that Aristotle means that substances exist in themselves because each can be defined without mentioning something distinct from it, whereas no relative can be defined without mentioning something distinct from it.

<sup>11</sup> However, Alexander's use of *huphestanai* (83. 25) suggests he assumes that existential independence is at issue; see *De mixtione* 217. 33–4 with 228. 13–14, 24. For some discussion of the word, see R. B. Todd, *Alexander of Aphrodisias on Stoic Physics* (Leiden, 1976), 192.

Now it is sometimes held that Plato, at least in the middle dialogues, denies that anything can be said of the Form of F other than that it is F.<sup>12</sup> If that view were correct, then Plato would not want to allow that, in defining one Form, one needs to refer to anything else. Perhaps Aristotle then has in mind the first possibility, and urges it as an *ad hominem* argument against Plato?

If so, his argument fails; for Plato does not deny that in defining a given Form one needs to refer to other Forms (and so to something distinct from the Form—substance—being defined). In the *Parmenides* (133B–134E), for example, he admits, indeed insists, that at least relational Forms are defined in terms of one another; the Form of master, for example, is defined in terms of the Form of slave. Nor is this a late development.<sup>13</sup> Even in the middle dialogues Plato is quite happy to admit, indeed he insists, that in defining Forms one needs to refer to other Forms. In the *Phaedo* (103E–104B), for example, he says that whatever is odd is odd in virtue of participating in the Form of odd; so the Form of three is odd in virtue of participating in the Form of odd.<sup>14</sup> In *Republic* 6 (e.g. 505A–B, 506A, 508D–509B) he insists that a full account of a thing requires relating it to the Form of the good. Every Form, in Plato's view (not just relational Forms), is essentially related to the Form of the good, and that fact must be reflected in a full account of any Form.

So Aristotle can hardly urge, as an *ad hominem* argument against Plato, that some Forms have definitions that refer to other things; for that is a point on which Plato himself insists. Although Plato does indeed count Forms as substances partly because of their definitional basicness, he does not think their definitional basicness requires them to be defined independently of everything else. Perhaps they in some sense need to be able to be defined independently of sensibles; but they do not need to be able to be defined independently of one another.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> This claim goes along with some accounts of Plato's alleged semantic atomism. See, e.g., Owen, 'Notes on Ryle's Plato', *LSD*, ch. 5; N. P. White, *Plato on Knowledge and Reality* (Indianapolis, 1976), ch. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Contrast White, *Plato on Knowledge and Reality*, 79 n. 16, who believes that this passage shows increased awareness of the nature of relatives, of a sort not to be found in the middle dialogues.

<sup>14</sup> I discuss this passage in more detail in 'Forms as Causes: Plato and Aristotle', in A. Graeser (ed.), *Metaphysics and Mathematics* (Berne, 1987), 69–112; and 'Immanence', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 4 (1986), 71–97.

<sup>15</sup> In his fourth objection Aristotle asks whether Forms can be defined independently of sensibles in the requisite way; I take up this question below.

Might Aristotle then mean that, although Plato allows that in defining Forms one needs to refer to other things, he ought not to do so? That is, perhaps Aristotle's objection is not the *ad hominem* one that Plato is committed to mentioning something besides the Form of equal in defining it, but would not want to be so committed; perhaps his objection is rather that, although Plato believes that in defining the Form of equal one needs to mention something else, he ought not to believe that, given his view that Forms are substances?

But Aristotle ought not to urge this argument either. At least, his own substances do not seem to exist in themselves in this sense. Socrates, for example, can only be defined<sup>16</sup> by reference to his species, which is distinct from him (for example, it survives his loss, and is predicated of more than one thing). Or, again, the species man can only be defined by reference to its genus, animal, which is distinct from it.<sup>17</sup>

The first possibility seems wrong, then. It does not specify an account of being in itself that Aristotle's substances satisfy; nor is it an account Plato believes Forms must satisfy. It works neither as an *ad hominem* objection to Plato nor as an objection Aristotle is well placed to voice in his own right.

Let us then consider a second possibility. Perhaps the thought is that substances exist in themselves because each can be defined without reference to any non-substance—a condition that (Aristotle believes) cannot be fulfilled in the case of the Form of equal, which therefore cannot be a substance. Aristotle does, at any rate, seem to believe that definitions of substances need not refer to non-substances (cf. e.g. *Metaph. Z 1*), and it might seem that he can defend this claim better than he can defend the claim that a substance can be defined without reference to anything distinct from it.<sup>18</sup> The claim in this case

<sup>16</sup> One might argue that, strictly speaking, for Aristotle particulars have no definitions. Still, they at least have formulae or *logoi* in some weaker sense.

<sup>17</sup> Contrast Owen, 'The Platonism of Aristotle', *LSD*, ch. 11, and M. Woods, 'Substance and Essence in Aristotle', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 75 (1974-5), 167-80, both of whom in effect argue that Aristotle is committed to the view that Socrates is identical to the species man. For some criticism of their arguments, see my 'Owen, Aristotle, and the Third Man', *Phronesis*, 27 (1982), 13-33; and also J. Kung, 'Aristotle on thises, suches, and the Third Man Argument', *Phronesis*, 26 (1981), 207-47.

<sup>18</sup> However, it is not clear that in the end Aristotle can defend his claim satisfactorily. In the *Organon*, for example, it is unclear that Aristotelian substances can be defined independently of non-substances; for their definitions seem to need to refer to differentiae, which, in the *Organon* are not counted as substances. However, by the time of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle may have come to believe that differentiae are substances; that

is that the Form of equal, being a substance, ought to be able to be defined without mentioning any non-substance; but, Aristotle insists, it cannot be so defined. Why not?

We might again first try interpreting the argument as an *ad hominem* one. For example, we have seen that, given SP, the Form of equal is equal. Perhaps Aristotle believes that it can be equal only by being equal to something Plato views as a non-substance? But it is difficult to see how Aristotle could argue this. For in his second objection he claims that the Form of equal can be equal only by being equal to a second Form of equal.<sup>19</sup> But Plato would view any Form of equal as a substance.

However, Aristotle's argument probably should not be taken to be *ad hominem*. Aristotle no doubt sees quite well that Plato believes that any Form of equal is a substance; his present point is that Plato ought not to believe that. For, in Aristotle's view, any Form of equal is a relative and, Aristotle believes, no relative can be a substance. Hence if, in defining one Form of equal we need to refer to another Form of equal, we need to refer to something Aristotle takes to be a non-substance. If this is right, then we have here, as so often in the debate between Plato and Aristotle, a confrontation between two opposed metaphysical outlooks. Plato and Aristotle agree that substances must be definitionally basic. But Plato believes, whereas Aristotle denies, that at least some relatives enjoy the requisite sort of definitional

is one possible reading of Z 12. To avoid this complication, one could put the second possibility by saying that one can define substances without referring to anything in any non-substance category; for in the *Organon* Aristotle does not place differentiae in any non-substance category any more than he places them in the category of substance. Even so, difficulties might remain. For in the *Metaphysics*, in contrast to the *Categories*, the species and genera of substance no longer seem to be substances; if they are not substances, yet definitions of substances need to refer to them, then in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle must admit that the definitions of substances need to refer to non-substances. For a defence of the view that in the *Metaphysics* the species and genera of substances are no longer substances, see my 'Plato and Aristotle on Form and Substance', and M. Frede, 'Substance in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*', in his *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (OUP, 1987), ch. 5. T. H. Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles* (OUP, 1988), ch. 12, defends the view that in the *Metaphysics* the species and genera of substances count not as primary, but as secondary, substances.

<sup>19</sup> In exploring the second objection I ask whether Aristotle is right to say that the Form of equal can be equal only by being equal to a second Form of equal. Here, however, the crucial question is only whether definitions of Forms need to mention anything Plato views as a non-substance. At *Top.* 147<sup>a</sup> Aristotle suggests that the definitions of some Forms may need to mention other Forms; he does not suggest that definitions of Forms ever need to mention anything other than Forms (and so Platonic non-substances).

basicness. It is Aristotle's disagreement with Plato on this fundamental issue that motivates his present argument.<sup>20</sup>

So far I have explicated the notion of being in itself solely in terms of definitional independence. One might wish to interpret it in terms of existential independence instead. If so, my account still holds, *mutatis mutandis*. Neither Aristotelian nor Platonic substances can exist independently of everything else. Socrates (an Aristotelian substance) cannot exist independently of man. For Plato, no Forms can exist independently of the Form of the good. Aristotle would say that makes all Forms depend on a non-substance (since, in his view, 'good' is a non-substance predicate and so, given SP, the Form of the good is a non-substance); Plato would say that only makes Forms depend on another substance (since, in his view, the Form of the good is a substance).<sup>21</sup> If Platonic Forms are separate, however, then they can exist independently of sensibles (i.e. of Platonic non-substances). It is not clear, however, that Aristotelian substances can exist independently of Aristotelian non-substances; Socrates cannot exist unless he has some height and weight, for example, although he need not have any determinate height or weight in order to exist. If we turn to the existential reading, Platonic substances (assuming separation, and allowing that all Forms are substances) seem to satisfy the 'in itself' requirement *better* than Aristotle's own substances do. So the existential reading does not help to make Aristotle's objection more plausible.<sup>22</sup>

This first argument, then, is an example of one of the Aristotelian

<sup>20</sup> I discuss this issue in more detail in 'Relational Entities', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 65 (1983), 225–49. Notice that since I have focused on what it is to be in itself, a feature Aristotle believes only substances have, his argument, if it works at all, shows not only that no relative can be a substance but also, more generally, that no non-substance (i.e. no entity Aristotle places into a non-substance category) can be a substance (i.e. a basic being). In *Metaph. A 9* (990<sup>b</sup>27–991<sup>a</sup>2) Aristotle argues just this.

<sup>21</sup> In *Rep.* 6, 509b 7–8, Plato says that the Form of the good is not *ousia*. If we take this to mean that it is not a substance, then Aristotle could urge that Plato himself believes that all Forms depend on something that even in his own view is not a substance. I assume, however, that that is not what Plato means to say. For a brief account of what I take him to mean, see my 'Knowledge and Belief in *Republic* V–VII', in S. Everson (ed.), *Companions to Ancient Thought: Epistemology* (Cambridge, 1990), 97–8.

<sup>22</sup> See 'Plato and Aristotle on Form and Substance'. Of course, Aristotle might object to the argument just proffered that I have begged the question in favour of Plato in giving him separation; for Aristotle believes that Forms, being universals, cannot be separate. But my point is that Plato seems internally better off here than Aristotle does. If, as Aristotle believes, universals cannot exist uninstantiated, then Plato holds a false view; but that is a different matter.

strategies I mentioned at the outset: Aristotle faults a Platonic argument only by intruding into it Aristotelian assumptions which Plato rejects. He does not misunderstand or misinterpret Plato. But neither does he convict Plato of internal inconsistency. The dispute between them involves hard philosophical questions about the nature of substances.

## 2. Aristotle's second objection: Self-Predication and Uniqueness conflict

Aristotle's second objection to AR runs as follows: 'Further, if the equal is equal to an equal, there will be more than one idea of equal; for the equal itself is equal to an equal itself; for if it were not equal to something, it would not be equal at all' (83. 26–8).

The argument may be schematized as follows:

- (1) Whatever is equal is equal to something.
- (2) The Form of equal is equal.
- (3) Therefore, the Form of equal is equal to something.
- (4) The Form of equal can be equal only to another Form of equal.
- (5) Therefore, if there is even one Form of equal, there are at least two Forms of equal.
- (6) For any predicate 'F' for which there is a corresponding Form, there is just one Form of F (= Uniqueness).
- (7) Therefore, if there is even one Form of equal, there is just one Form of equal.
- (8) Not both: (5) and (7).

Aristotle's strategy is again clear. On the one hand, Plato accepts self-predication (SP); any Form of F is itself F. So the Form of equal must be equal. But anything that is equal is equal to something; so the Form of equal is equal to something. It can be equal only to another Form of equal; and so there are at least two Forms of equal, if there are any at all. But this violates Plato's Uniqueness assumption (U), according to which, if there is any Form corresponding to 'F', there is just one. SP and U thus come into conflict at least in the special case of the Form of equal.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Later in the *Peri ideōn* Aristotle argues that the Forms posited by the Accurate One over Many are vulnerable to an infinite regress: if there is even one Form of F, there are

This second argument, like the first, is valid. But we can again raise questions about its soundness, and about its effectiveness as an *ad hominem* objection to Plato.

I begin by considering (2). Since I believe Plato accepts self-predication, I believe he accepts (2). There are, however, different accounts of self-predication. Here I shall distinguish between just two interpretations: *narrow self-predication* (NSP) and *broad self-predication* (BSP). I believe Plato is committed only to BSP, but Aristotle's objection seems to assume NSP.<sup>24</sup>

On NSP, the Form of F is F in roughly the same way in which F sensibles are F. So, for example, the Form of white (if there is one) is coloured white; the Form of dog (if there is one) can scratch its ears; and so on. Of course, there must be some differences in the ways in which the Form of F and sensible Fs are F, since the former is perfectly F, the latter only imperfectly F. But this is only to say that the Form of large, for example, is the largest thing there could be; the Form of small the smallest thing there could be; and so on. Although sensible Fs are imperfectly F, the Form of F perfectly F, they are none the less F in essentially the same way, in virtue of roughly the same sorts of features.

On BSP, as on NSP, the Form of F is predicatively F; the Form of F is a member of the class of F things.<sup>25</sup> However, BSP countenances

infinitely many Forms of F, again in conflict with U. This is the Third Man Argument (TMA), one premiss of which is SP. Aristotle seems to believe that the Forms posited by AR are immune to the TMA (hence, since AR involves SP, SP is not sufficient for the TMA). (For some discussion, see my 'Aristotle and the More Accurate Arguments', in M. Schofield and M. Nussbaum (eds.), *Language and Logos* [Cambridge, 1982], 155–77.) His present objection shows, however, that he believes that the Forms posited by AR fall prey to a 'mini-regress': there are two Forms of equal, if any at all. Hence even if the Forms generated by AR escape the TMA, U is violated in a more modest way—at least for some Forms, and again in part because of SP. At *Parm.* 132A–C Plato argues that if we construe Forms as thoughts, there will be two Forms for every predicate for which there is as many as one Form: the Form-thought, and what the Form-thought is of. Once again, there are two Forms corresponding to a given predicate, though no larger regress is in the offing. For some discussion of the *Parmenides* passage, see my 'The Object of Thought Argument: Forms and Thoughts', *Apeiron*, 21 (1988), 105–45, esp. 126–30.

<sup>24</sup> I defend BSP, though only briefly, in 'Immanence'. For a now classic defence of NSP, see G. Vlastos, 'The Third Man Argument in the *Parmenides*', in R. E. Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics* [SPM] (London, 1965), ch. 12. Vlastos has now abandoned NSP in favour of what he calls Pauline Predication (PP); see n. 27 below.

<sup>25</sup> Hence BSP differs from the 'identity view', according to which sentences of the form 'The Form of F is F' mean only that the Form of F is identical to itself. For this view, see, e.g., R. E. Allen, 'Participation and Predication in Plato's Middle Dialogues', SPM, ch. 4.

more ways of being F, more criteria for being included in the class of F things, than NSP does.<sup>26</sup> In particular, on BSP the Form of F is F in quite a different way from the way in which (most) sensible F particulars are F. It is F because, being the property of F, it explains the F-ness of F things. On BSP, the Form of large, for example, is perfectly large, not because it is the largest object there could be, but because, being the property of large, it is the ultimate source or explanation of anything's being large.<sup>27</sup> For Plato, if something explains the F-ness of F things, it is itself predicatively F, of belonging to the class of F things.

At first, this might sound quite counter-intuitive: how can Plato believe that being the explanatory property of F is a way of being F? Be that as it may, BSP arises naturally from the dialogues. For Plato often says that a given action type, or character trait, is both F and not F. The character trait of endurance, for example, is said to be both brave and not brave, in so far as endurance sometimes explains why a given token action is brave, and sometimes explains why a different token action is merely foolish (*La.* 192C-E). Similarly, the action type of returning what one owes is said to be both just and not just, on the ground that some token actions of returning what one owes are just, others not just (*Rep.* 331C)—it is just for me to return my library books on time, but it is not just for you to return a borrowed sword to its suicidal owner. Hence, Plato concludes, endurance cannot be what courage, that property or Form, is; and returning what one owes cannot be what justice, that property or Form, is. For the property, Form, of F cannot itself be not F; that is, appeal to it can never explain why something is not F. The Form or property of F must be F, must explain the F-ness of F things; but it cannot also be not F, explain why anything is not F. Such claims may initially sound surprising; but once we understand what they mean, they are not so surprising. To say that the Form of F is F is only to say that it is the ultimate source or explanation of why anything is F, and that reference to it never as such explains why anything is not F.

<sup>26</sup> To say that the Form of F and F sensibles are F in different *ways* is not to say that they are F in different *senses* of 'F'. On my view, Plato intends a claim about different ways of being F, but not about different senses of 'F'.

<sup>27</sup> Hence BSP differs from PP, according to which to say that the Form of F is F is only to say that, necessarily, whatever is F is F. Unlike BSP, PP is reductive; BSP includes an explanatory claim absent in PP. For an account of PP, see Vlastos, 'A Note on "Pauline Predications" in Plato', *Phronesis*, 19 (1974), 95–101.



To be sure, this practice involves a more generous conception of the extensions of predicates than one might initially acknowledge. But revising preanalytic beliefs about the extensions of predicates is a favourite Platonic pastime. The *Laches* (196E–197C) argues that lions are not courageous; the *Republic* (bk. 4) argues that justice, for a person, is to be defined, not in terms of one's relations to others, but in terms of psychic harmony; and so on. In advocating BSP, Plato follows that practice further, suggesting that the property of F is a member of the class of F things.<sup>28</sup> This is a revisionary claim, and one we may well not accept; but we should at least be clear how different it is from NSP.

I agree with Aristotle, then, that Plato accepts SP; and so I agree with him that Plato accepts (2). But if Plato accepts only a BSP reading of (2), then he rejects (3). For on BSP the Form of equal is equal, not by being equal to anything, but because, being the property of equality, it explains the equality of equal things. The way in which Plato rejects (3) shows that he also rejects (1); contrary to (1), not everything that is equal is equal to something; for the Form of equal is a counter-example. Without (1) and (3), the rest of the argument cannot go through.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Similarly, in *Republic* 10 Plato claims not only that actual beds and the Form of bed are beds, but also that pictures of beds are beds. Here again he exhibits his generous ways with the extensions of predicates. In counting pictures of beds as beds, he does not mean that we can sleep on them, though less well than on actual beds; he means that pictures of beds are beds in so far as they reveal what it is to be a bed, though less well than actual beds or the Form of bed do. His account of pictures of Fs is of a piece with his account of self-predication as I interpret it.

<sup>29</sup> Several people have suggested to me that even if Plato accepts (1)–(3) he can still evade the argument by rejecting (4); for presumably the Form of equal is equal to itself. In support of this suggestion, one might note that in the *Parmenides* (140 B 6–8) Plato says that *a* is equal to *b* just in case *a* and *b* are of the same measures; and surely everything is the same measures as itself? One might also argue that (4) is false on the ground that since all Forms lack measures, they are all the same measures as one another; hence, if the Form of equal needs to be equal to something distinct from itself, it can be equal to another Form. Either way, even if Plato accepts (3), he need not import a second Form of equal for the first Form of equal to be equal to.

I am inclined to say, however, that even if the Form of equal is equal to itself or to other Forms, that is not the point Plato means to convey when he speaks as though the Form of equal is self-predicative. The Form of equal counts as being genuinely equal, for Plato, not because it is equal to itself or to other Forms, but because it is the property of equality that explains the equality of equal things; if it is equal to itself or to other Forms, that is a further fact about it, not encapsulated in the claim that it is self-predicative. Hence, even if Plato could or does reject (4), it is important to see that he also (if I am right about his account of self-predication) rejects (1) and (3), and that he is

Aristotle, however, commits Plato not only to (2) but also to (1) and (3). In doing so, he seems to assume that Plato is committed to NSP. At least, it seems more reasonable on NSP than on BSP to argue that the Form of equal can be equal only by being equal to a second Form of equal.<sup>30</sup> Does Aristotle then misinterpret Plato? We need not say so.

more likely to appeal to their falsity than to the falsity of (4) in responding to Aristotle's argument.

Moreover, one might argue that the Form of equal cannot be equal to itself or to other Forms, on the ground that only things that have measures can be equal to something; since the Form of equal is incorporeal, it lacks measures and so cannot, in the relevant sense, be equal to itself or to other Forms. On the other hand, in the *Categories*, 6<sup>a</sup> 26–35, Aristotle says that the *idion* of quantities is being called equal and unequal (qualities, by contrast, are said to be similar or dissimilar to one another). But he allows numbers to be equal, and numbers presumably lack spatial measures. So equality is at least not restricted to things that have spatial measures.

However, Aristotle begins *Categories* 7 by saying that relatives are what they are 'of' (or 'than') *other things* (*heterôn*, 6<sup>a</sup> 37); so perhaps he treats equality in such a way that one thing can be equal only by being equal to something else. Later he says that unequals are unequal to something (6<sup>b</sup> 23), meaning, I assume, to something distinct from themselves; he does not take up the question of whether equals are equal only to other things or also to themselves, though in the preceding clause he considered the case both of dissimilarity and of similarity.

<sup>30</sup> At least, it seems more reasonable to say this, if we do not want to say that the Form of equal is equal by being equal to itself; see previous note. To say that it is more reasonable on NSP than on BSP to commit Plato not only to (2) but also to (1), and so to (3), is not to say that it is ultimately correct to do so. And in fact the issue is quite complicated, partly because these are different conceptions of how the Form of equal, if it is NSP-equal, is to be conceived. For example, Owen (in e.g. 'Proof' and 'Dialectic and Eristic') suggests that the Form of equal should be conceived as a single object that, Plato allegedly believes, can somehow be NSP-equal all on its own, so that 'equal' functions as a complete or one-place predicate as applied to the Form. If (contrary to my view) the Form of equal should be so conceived, then Aristotle's objection seems successful, at least in so far as he would clearly be correct to protest against such a view, for it would, among other things, involve misunderstanding the logic of relative predicates. (Although on BSP 'equal' in a way functions as a one-place predicate as applied to the Form of equal, it does not do so in a way that involves misunderstanding of the logic of relative predicates.) On the other hand, P. T. Geach, 'The Third Man Again', *Philosophical Review*, 65 (1956), 72–8, argues that the Form of equal consists of two perfectly equal parts; when Plato says that the Form of equal is equal, he means that its two parts are perfectly equal to one another. On this view, although the Form of equal is NSP-equal, Plato does not thereby misunderstand the logic of relative predicates. Further, on this view, Plato can intelligibly say that the Form of equal is equal, without needing to invoke a second Form of equal. (Nor need he say that the Form of equal is equal to itself or to other Forms, even if he would or could say that.) I do not think Geach's view is correct—for on it, Forms are particulars and enjoy NSP whereas, on my view, Forms are properties, not particulars, and Plato is committed only to BSP and not to NSP. None the less, I do not think it is vulnerable to all of the objections that have been levelled against it. (For some objections to it, see Owen, 'Proof', 174–5 n. 34; and 'Dialectic and Eristic', 230–1.) If one

For he might be seen as arguing as follows: 'You use self-predicational language. NSP provides the most straightforward, intuitive reading of such language. If your language is read in that way, then my argument succeeds. Of course, you might protest that you mean us to read you in some other, less straightforward way. But then you are not well advised to speak as you do; and you certainly never trouble to spell out the alternative you have in mind. If the Form of equal isn't equal to something, it isn't really predicatively equal at all; it violates ordinary beliefs too far to suppose that something can be predicatively equal without being equal to something. Not only, then, is BSP not spelt out in anything like the necessary detail; but it also involves too radical a revision of ordinary beliefs to be credible.'<sup>31</sup>

Here, then, we have an example of the other Aristotelian strategy mentioned earlier: Aristotle interprets Plato's unclear use of self-predicational language in what he takes to be the most literal, straightforward, natural manner. The argument he levels against Plato, so interpreted, may well succeed.<sup>32</sup> But Plato can protest that he ought not to be so interpreted, for he accepts only BSP, not NSP. This is not to say that Aristotle misunderstands Plato. Rather, he issues a challenge: explain what Plato means, if not the natural interpretation Aristotle suggests.

### 3. Aristotle's third objection: The Argument from Relatives generates a Form of unequal

Further, by the same argument there will have to be ideas of unequals too. For opposites are on a similar footing in so far as there will be ideas of both or of neither. For the unequal is also agreed by them to be in more than one thing (*en pleiosin*). (83. 28–30)

favours NSP, it is worth asking how far Geach's sort of view can be pressed, and how we ought to interpret Aristotle's objections in its light.

<sup>31</sup> Aristotle also probably believes that whether or not Plato intends NSP, he is nevertheless committed to it on various grounds. For example, he seems to think that since Plato separates Forms, they are particulars (see e.g. *Metaph. M 9*). If the Form of man, for example, is both a particular (given separation) and a man (given SP), then presumably it is a particular man; but if the Form of man is a particular man, NSP seems the best account of SP. This line of argument involves several controversial steps that I cannot explore here.

<sup>32</sup> Though, as I have said (n. 30), it is not entirely clear that it does.

Aristotle argues here that the same reasoning that commits Plato to the existence of a Form of equal commits him to the existence of a Form of unequal. Further, the same argument that, in the preceding argument, commits Plato to the existence of two Forms of equal commits him to the existence of two Forms of unequal. Hence there is again a reduplication of a Form, and so another violation of U.

I agree that if Plato is committed to the existence of two Forms of equal, and if he is also committed to the existence of at least one Form of unequal, then he is committed to the existence of two Forms of unequal. But is Plato committed to the existence of a Form of unequal? One might argue that the Argument from Relatives—the argument that, in the context, establishes a Form of equal—does not establish a Form of unequal. The Argument from Relatives basically posits a Form of equal on the ground that sensible equals are imperfectly equal. But if they are imperfectly equal, are they not perfectly unequal? If so, then we do not need a Form of unequal, at least, not on the basis of the Argument from Relatives.<sup>33</sup>

This objection fails, however, for sensible equals are not perfectly unequal. On the contrary, they are imperfectly unequal in just the way in which they are imperfectly equal. Every sensible object that is unequal to something is imperfectly equal, because each is equal to some things but unequal to others; and every sensible property of equality (e.g. being three inches) is imperfectly equal, because each no more explains why things are equal than it explains why they are unequal. (Three inches no more explains why this three-inch stick is equal to that one than it explains why it is unequal to that five-inch one—that is, three inches can equally well explain A's being equal to B and its being unequal to C. For Plato that means that it does not explain anything's equality properly.<sup>34</sup>) If a sensible object is perfectly equal, it cannot be unequal to anything; and if a sensible property is perfectly equal, it cannot explain why one thing is unequal to another.

Similarly, then, if a sensible object is perfectly unequal, it cannot be equal to anything; and if a sensible property is perfectly unequal, it cannot explain anything's equality as well as it explains something's inequality. But every sensible object is equal to everything of the same measures; and every sensible property explains why some things are

<sup>33</sup> For this objection, though it is not directed to the present context, see D. Gallop, *Plato's Phaedo* (OUP, 1975), 125: 'sensible unequals could hardly be held to "fall short" of Inequality in the way that sensible equals may be held to fall short of Equality'.

<sup>34</sup> For further discussion, see 'Forms as Causes'.

equal no less than it explains why other things are unequal. Hence no sensible object or property is either perfectly equal or perfectly unequal. If the imperfect equality of sensible equals requires a perfect Form of equal, then by the same token the imperfect inequality of sensibles requires a perfect Form of unequal.

Aristotle is thus correct to suggest that Plato is committed not only to a Form of equal, but also to a Form of unequal. But Plato would not be upset at being so committed. For he seems quite cheerfully to acknowledge not only a Form of equal, but also one of unequal; indeed, he seems to acknowledge Forms of opposites quite generally.<sup>35</sup> Aristotle does not misinterpret Plato, however; for his objection concerns, not the initial postulation of a Form of unequal, but its reduplication. We have already seen, however, how to evade this objection; the same criticism that vitiates Aristotle's second objection applies here as well. If Plato is committed only to BSP, and not to NSP, then he need not introduce a second Form of unequal in order to explain the inequality of the Form of unequal.

#### 4. A fourth objection: All Forms are relatives<sup>36</sup>

I turn now to the fourth and final objection—actually a series of related objections—that I shall consider here:

Further, it follows that they must say that what is relative (*prosti*) is a principle of and is prior to what exists in itself (*kath' hauto*), in so far as the idea, for

<sup>35</sup> Cf. e.g. *Rep.* 5, 475E 9–476A 7 (just and unjust; good and bad); 7, 523–5 (hard and soft; thick and thin; and so on); *Phaedo* 101 (large and small) and, possibly, 74B–C (equality and inequality); also *Parm.* 128E 6–130A 2 (Forms of like and unlike); *Soph.* 254A 14–255E 1 (Forms of same and different). Another reason for denying that Plato wants Forms for all opposites is that Forms are supposed to be objects of supreme value; they are perfect and ideals aimed at. But how then could there be Forms of e.g. ugly and bad?

H. F. Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy* (Baltimore, 1944), 278, suggests that unequal is not an opposite, but a negation; and we know from Aristotle's criticisms of the One over Many Argument that he believes that Plato does not want Forms of negations. But unequal is not a negation. The negation of P is the complement of P. The negation of equal is 'not equal', not 'unequal'. ('Not equal' differs from 'unequal' if we assume that only things that have measures, or are quantities, can be equal or unequal to one another. In this case, colours, for example, should not be said to be equal or unequal to one another, any more than a rock, for example, should be said to be either sighted or blind; see n. 29.) For some discussion of negations and the One over Many, see my 'The One over Many', *Philosophical Review*, 89 (1980), 197–240.

<sup>36</sup> The passage I go on to discuss is part of the longer section 85. 21–88. 2. It is disputed how much of this longer section belongs to the *Peri ideōn*. For a detailed

them, is a principle of substances (*ousiai*), yet what it is for an idea to be an idea lies in its being a paradigm, and a paradigm is a relative; for a paradigm is a paradigm of something. Again, if being for ideas lies in their being paradigms, then things that come into being relative to them, and of which they are the ideas, will be likenesses of them; and so someone might say that according to them all naturally constituted things turn out to be relatives; for they are all likenesses or paradigms. Again, if being for ideas lies in their being paradigms, and a paradigm exists for the sake of what comes into being relative to it, and what exists on account of something else is less worthy than that thing, then the ideas will be less worthy than what comes into being relative to them (86. 13–23).

The passage may be schematized as follows:

- (1) Forms are principles of, and so are prior to, substances.
- (2) Forms are essentially paradigms.
- (3) If  $x$  is a paradigm,  $x$  is a relative.
- (4) Therefore, Forms are relatives.
- (5) Relatives are posterior to substances.
- (6) Hence, Forms are posterior to substances.
- (7) Not both: (1) and (6).
- (8) Things that come into being in relation to paradigmatic Forms are likenesses of them.
- (9) Likenesses are relatives.
- (10) Forms and things that come into being in relation to Forms are the only naturally constituted things.
- (11) Therefore, all naturally constituted things are relatives.
- (12) Paradigms exist ⟨only⟩ for the sake of what comes into being in relation to them.
- (13) If  $x$  exists ⟨only⟩ for the sake of  $y$ ,  $x$  is inferior to  $y$ .
- (14) Therefore, Forms are inferior to sensibles.

I begin by considering (1)–(7); they are interestingly related to the first objection, where Aristotle argued that since the Form of equal is a relative, it cannot be a substance. That argument involved a two-level paradox, alleging contradiction between a property the Form of equal

discussion of the dispute, and a defence of the claim that most of the section belongs to the *Peri ideōn*, see J. Annas, 'Forms and First Principles', *Phronesis*, 19 (1974), 257–83. (She exempts a few remarks she takes to be Alexandrian.) Some of those who doubt that most of this section belongs to the *Peri ideōn* none the less agree that at least the passage I shall be discussing (86. 13–23) is from it; see, e.g., Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism*, 300 and n. 199. Whether or not the passage is from the *Peri ideōn*, there seems no reason to doubt that it is Aristotelian; and the objections it raises are related to the first objection in a sufficiently interesting way for it to be appropriate to discuss them here.

has *qua* being a Form (namely, being a substance), and a property the Form of equal has *qua* being the particular Form it is (namely, being a relative). In (1)–(7), by contrast, Aristotle presents a one-level paradox, alleging contradiction between two properties every Form has simply *qua* being a Form.<sup>37</sup> For every Form, simply *qua* being a Form, is a principle of substance; but if *x* is a principle of *y*, *x* must be prior to *y*. Forms must thus be prior to substances. However, every Form, simply *qua* being a Form, is also a paradigm; and paradigms are relatives. If Forms are paradigms, and so relatives, they cannot be substances since, as we have seen, no relative can be a substance; still less, then, can they be principles of substance. Forms thus cannot be both principles and paradigms.

Like the other arguments we have explored, this argument is valid. But we can again raise questions about its soundness, and about its effectiveness against Plato.

(1) claims that Forms are the principles of, and so are prior to, substances. I shall assume this means that Forms are supposed to be the principles of the entities Aristotle takes to be substances, of such entities as an individual man or horse or tree.<sup>38</sup> Plato clearly believes (1), if it is so read.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> In the terminology introduced before, the one-level paradox is between A-level properties.

<sup>38</sup> Not all Aristotelian substances are such entities, of course; but such entities seem to be the ones primarily at issue here.

<sup>39</sup> Although it seems easiest to read (1) this way, I am not sure it is correct to do so. For one thing, it seems somewhat awkward for Aristotle to use 'substances' here to refer to his candidate substances. However, later stages of the argument perhaps suggest that that is what he is doing; and certainly elsewhere in the *Peri ideōn* he uses terminology in his own way even when he aims to articulate a Platonic argument (cf. e.g. his use of 'homonymy' in the Argument from Relatives). It might be a second count against reading (1) this way that it makes (5) seem rather question-begging; however, perhaps later stages of the argument also explain why Aristotle feels entitled to (5) even if it is so read.

Three other possible readings are worth considering:

(a) Forms are principles of the entities Plato (not Aristotle) views as substances. But as against (a), one would expect Plato to claim, not that Forms are the principles of his own substances, but that they are the substances themselves. Of course, he might believe that some of his Forms are principles of others—he seems to think, for example, that the Form of the good is in some way a principle of all other Forms (see e.g. *Rep.* 6, 309b 6–10). But (1) claims, not that some Forms are principles of some substances, but that Forms as such are principles of substances as such. Perhaps (Aristotle assumes that) Plato believes that something can be a principle of itself?

(b) Aristotle might be thinking of the one and the indefinite dyad, which are of concern in surrounding passages.

(c) Aristotle might mean that Forms are the principles of the basic beings, whatever

As to (2), Plato certainly claims that Forms are paradigms,<sup>40</sup> but it is less clear whether he believes that they are *essentially* paradigms. Here much depends on precisely how we understand paradigmaticism; different accounts are possible, and they might yield different Platonic commitments. Let us say for now that Plato accepts (2) in so far as he believes that Forms are essentially perfect—they are essentially perfect in so far as they escape compresence (the Form of F is F, and not also not F), and so on—and that their perfection makes them especially suitable for being used as paradigms—for example, for being emulated or copied.<sup>41</sup>

The suggestion in (3) is that if *x* is a paradigm, it is a paradigm *of* something; but if *x* is of something, then it is a relative. Let us agree about this too.<sup>42</sup> What are Forms alleged to be paradigms of, and so relative to? Later stages of the argument make it clear that Aristotle takes Forms to be paradigms of sensibles; the Form of beauty, for example, is a paradigm for or of sensible beautiful things. I assume that Plato believes this in some sense too. At least, in the *Phaedo* (100D) he says that if anything other than the Form of beauty is beautiful, it is beautiful by being suitably related to the Form of beauty; and he sometimes explains the relevant relation by saying that sensibles are

they turn out to be. On this reading, 'substances' refers neutrally to the basic beings, whatever they are, without taking a stand on what they are.

<sup>40</sup> At e.g. *Parm.* 132D 2. *Tim.* 28–9 (and elsewhere in the *Timaeus*; though note that in e.g. 28–9 the entities called paradigms are not explicitly said to be Forms), *Rep.* 500E 3 and 540A. It is worth remarking, however, that Plato calls Forms paradigms far less frequently than is sometimes supposed. He does not, for example, call Forms paradigms anywhere in the *Phaedo*, where one might expect him to.

<sup>41</sup> One might argue that in order to be a paradigm at all, whether essentially so or not, a thing must actually be used in a given way; it is not enough for it to be suitable for being so used. I take up this argument briefly below, but for now I assume an account of being essentially a paradigm according to which it is fairly non-controversial to say that Plato takes Forms to be essentially paradigms. For another passage in which Aristotle seems to say that Forms are essentially paradigms, see 83. 18–22: 'This argument [i.e. the Argument from Relatives] does not, like the ones before it, seem to prove simply that the common thing is something besides the particulars, but rather that the paradigm is something which is related to things here and is fully. For this most of all is thought to be characteristic of ideas.' I discuss this passage briefly in 'Aristotle and the More Accurate Arguments'.

<sup>42</sup> Like (2), however, (3) raises various difficulties, for not everything that is in some way 'of' (or 'than') something seems to be a relative, in the sense of being an entity that falls into Aristotle's category of relatives; see J. L. Ackrill, *Aristotle's Categories and De Interpretatione* (OUP, 1966), 99. However, I shall not pursue such difficulties here; instead I ask what difficulties Plato faces if he concedes that in so far as Forms are paradigms they are relatives.



copies or likenesses of paradigmatic Forms. None the less, as we shall see, there are questions to be raised about precisely how Forms are relative to sensibles, and about the implications of their being relative to them in this way.

(6) concludes that Forms are not, as (1) had claimed, prior to substances, but posterior to them. Part of Aristotle's thought here is presumably that since relatives are the least prior beings of all, they cannot be the principles of, and so cannot be prior to, anything whatsoever. Still less, then, can they be the principles of, and so be prior to, substances, basic beings.<sup>43</sup>

Aristotle is here following the same strategy as in his first objection. He believes that relatives are the least prior beings of all, and (his) substances the most basic. He then uses these beliefs in order to argue that relatives cannot be principles of (his) substances. Plato has a ready reply, however, analogous to his reply to the first objection. For in his view, just as the fact that something is a relative does not preclude it from being a substance, so it does not preclude it from being a principle of substance. Further, he of course denies that Aristotle's candidates for substancehood are the right ones. Just as Plato and Aristotle disagree about the candidates, and about some of the criteria, for substantiality, so they disagree about the candidates

<sup>43</sup> In exploring the first objection, I said only that Aristotle believes that no relative can be a substance, i.e. a basic being. He believes, however, not only that relatives are not basic beings but also that they are the least important beings there are. His reasons are given in e.g. *Categories* 7, where he explains that nothing can be a relative, i.e. fall into the category of relatives, without also in some way being something else in another category (cf. also 86. 8–10). ('In some way' is important here, otherwise Aristotle might seem to be contradicting himself, suggesting first that no relative can be a substance and then suggesting that some relatives—e.g. fathers, masters—must be substances, in so far as they are entities in some other category, and here the relevant category is substance. Aristotle sometimes appeals to his '*qua*'-locution here: *x qua* father is a relative not a substance; *x qua* man is a substance not a relative. At other times he seems to suggest that the father and the man are non-identical but coincident. His central point in any case is that relatives are in some way more dependent on entities in other categories than any other non-substances are on substance.) For example, if something is a father it must also in a way be something else (a man); if something is equal it must also in a way be something else (a number, or an object of a certain length); and so on. Anything that is a relative is what it is by in some way also being something else in some other category; whereas nothing in any other category is also something in another category. To be sure, qualities, for example, in Aristotle's view, essentially belong to substances; they cannot exist if they do not belong to some substance or other. Still, even if every quality essentially *belongs* to something else (to a substance), no quality is also something else in another category. Hence relatives are, as Aristotle puts it elsewhere, 'least of all the categories a nature or substance' (*Metaph.* 1088<sup>a</sup>21–<sup>b</sup>4; cf. *NE* 1096<sup>a</sup>20–1, to which Alexander alludes at 86. 10).

and criteria for being principles. Once again, then, Aristotle's argument fails if it is taken to be *ad hominem*; but it may succeed from his alternative metaphysical perspective.<sup>44</sup>

So far we have explored Aristotle's objection at quite an abstract level; but it is worth probing more deeply. In saying that Forms are paradigms of, and so are relative to, sensibles, Aristotle seems to be suggesting that Forms are either definitionally or ontologically dependent on sensibles. Now in exploring the first objection we saw that Plato would not be upset if it were argued that he had to define Forms in terms of one another, or had to admit that some Forms are ontologically dependent on others; on the contrary, he seems quite freely to admit both claims. If he accepts separation, however, then he would not want to admit that Forms are ontologically dependent on sensibles; and since he takes Forms to be substances at least partly because they are definitionally basic, he might well also jibe if it could be shown that Forms have to be defined, not, this time, in terms of one another, but in terms of sensibles. Aristotle's present objection thus seems more threatening than the first objection. But how good an argument can Aristotle mount for the claim that Forms are either definitionally or ontologically dependent on sensibles? As before, I consider definitional dependence first.

Plato could insist, first of all, that even if definitions of Forms need to mention sensibles, still, it is equally true that definitions of sensibles need to mention Forms; so sensibles are at least not definitionally prior to Forms.

But does Aristotle's objection not at least show that Forms and sensibles are on the same footing, and would not that trouble Plato?

In fact, it is not clear that Aristotle's objection shows that Forms and sensibles are on the same footing. Plato might argue that even if definitions of Forms *qua* Forms need to refer to sensibles, just as the definitions of sensibles need to refer to Forms, still, Forms are none the less definitionally more basic. Here we can take a leaf out of Aristotle's *Categories*, where he says that 'in cases where two things reciprocate in implication of being, still, if one is in some way the explanation of the being of the other, it would reasonably be said to be naturally prior' (14<sup>b</sup>11–13).<sup>45</sup> Even if the definitions of Forms mention

<sup>44</sup> I say 'may' because, as I go on to explain briefly, I am not altogether sure that it does succeed from his own metaphysical perspective.

<sup>45</sup> Aristotle seems to use 'natural priority' here to indicate definitional or explanatory priority; elsewhere (e.g. *Metaph.* Δ 11) he uses the same phrase for ontological priority.

sensibles, and conversely, Forms can still be definitionally more basic if they explain sensibles in a way in which sensibles do not explain Forms. Merely to say that  $p$  and  $q$  are biconditionally related does not put them on an equal footing; for  $p$  might explain  $q$  in a way in which  $q$  does not explain  $p$ .

And it seems plain that Plato would argue that Forms are prior in explanation to sensibles. Forms are the entities we define in asking the 'What is F?' question; we can know that  $x$  is F, for any  $x$ , only if we know the Form of F. Forms explain the beings of things, why things are as they are and come to be as they do, in a special way that, so far as I can see, would not be compromised if Plato had to admit that fully to understand how Forms can play this explanatory role one must mention the entities they are invoked to explain.<sup>46</sup> If this is right, then Aristotle once again fails to level a successful *ad hominem* objection.

Nor is it clear that his argument succeeds from his alternative metaphysical perspective. To be sure, we have seen that he sometimes claims (e.g. in *Metaph. Z* 1) that substances—which, in the *Metaphysics*, I take to be individual forms—are definitionally basic in so far as their definitions do not need to mention any non-substances, whereas the definitions of non-substances do need to mention substances. However, he also sometimes claims that universals are the basic, perhaps the only, objects of knowledge and definition; yet, in the *Metaphysics*, no universal is a substance. It is unclear then, that Aristotle can consistently maintain that his substances (certain particulars) are definitionally prior to universals (his correlate, for present purposes, to Forms)—though perhaps the way in which he sometimes takes them to be definitionally prior is not compromised by the (different?) way in which he sometimes seems to favour universals.

What, now, about ontological dependence? Can Aristotle mount a good argument for the claim that if Forms are essentially paradigms and so relatives, their existence depends on the existence of sensibles, in violation of separation? It is true that, in Aristotle's view, some relatives cannot exist at  $t_1$  unless their correlatives also exist at  $t_1$ . For example, nothing can be a father at  $t_1$  if it does not have a child at  $t_1$ ; nothing can be a master at  $t_1$  if it does not have a slave at  $t_1$ . If Forms were relative to sensibles in this way, then they could not also be separate from, i.e. exist independently of, them in the requisite way. But Aristotle allows that some things can be relatives even if their

<sup>46</sup> I discuss the explanatory role of Forms in 'Forms as Causes' and in 'Plato and Aristotle on Form and Substance'.

correlatives never exist (cf. *Cat.* 7<sup>b</sup>15ff., *Metaph.* Δ 15; *De anima* 425<sup>b</sup>25–426<sup>a</sup>1). He says, for example, that knowledge and the knowable are correlatives, although the knowable can exist even if knowledge does not (*Cat.* 7<sup>b</sup>22–33). In *Metaph.* Δ 15 he says that the knowable is none the less called a relative because knowledge is so called from it (1021<sup>a</sup>29–30). If we concede to Aristotle that Forms are essentially paradigms in such a way as to be relatives, then I think we should say that they are relatives in much the way that Aristotle says that the knowable is. For sensibles are so called from Forms, just as knowledge is so called from the knowable. On this view, even if Forms are relatives they can exist whether or not sensibles ever do, just as the knowable can exist even if knowledge never does. Here, then, is a way in which Forms can be essentially paradigms, and so relatives, quite compatibly with their also being separate. As with the first objection, so here: turning to existential independence does not help Aristotle's case.

(1)–(7) are the most important stretch of the argument, but it is none the less worth while to look briefly at the rest of the argument. (8)–(9) imply that sensibles are relatives. This result would trouble *Aristotle*. For in his view, sensibles like Socrates are primary substances and so, as he views the matter, they cannot also be relatives. But it is far from clear that *Plato* would be troubled at having to admit that sensibles are relatives, in that they are what they are by being related in some way to Forms. Indeed, that simply seems to be his view.<sup>47</sup> Nor does this even conflict with Aristotle's claim that no substance is a relative since, for *Plato*, sensibles are not substances.

(12)–(13) imply (14); and *Plato* does not accept (14). (13) seems true if we take it to say that if *x* exists *only* for the sake of *y*, whereas *y* does not at all exist for the sake of *x*, then *x* is (at least to that extent and in that respect) inferior to *y*. If (12)–(13) imply (14), and (13) is true, then *Plato* can avoid (14) only by denying (12). And he would surely do so. No doubt *some* paradigms are plausibly viewed as being inferior to what they are paradigms of. Blueprints and designs, for example, might be thought to be inferior to the houses and so on that they are blueprints and designs of. But not all paradigms are plausibly viewed as being inferior to what they are paradigms of. Paradigms conceived as ideals aimed at are not inferior to the things that aim at them; and of course Forms are paradigms in this way.<sup>48</sup> The guardians in the *Republic*, for

<sup>47</sup> In the Argument from Relatives (83. 15–16) sensibles are said to be *pros* Forms.

<sup>48</sup> This point is well made by Annas, 'Forms and First Principles', 269–70.

example, strive to instantiate the Form of the good as widely as possible; since the demiurge in the *Timaeus* wanted the world to be as good as possible, he referred to Forms in fashioning his creation. Forms are also paradigms in so far as they are standards; to know whether or not anything is F, one needs to refer to the Form of F. This is because the Form of F just is the property of F; so, something is F if and only if it is suitably related to the Form of F, i.e. has it as a property. Hence, in order to know whether something is F one needs to know the Form of F, for that is just to know what it is to be F. Once again, if Forms are paradigms in this way, they are not inferior to what they are paradigms of.

Aristotle might protest, however, that if Plato takes Forms to be paradigms only in so far as they are standards and ideals aimed at then, as with self-predication, he uses language in an unhelpful way. Certainly Aristotle sometimes seems to suggest that properly speaking, a paradigm must be something like a blueprint or a design, something that guides a craftsman in his work. Since Forms are not paradigms of this sort, they should not be called paradigms at all. Hence in *Metaph. A* 9 (991<sup>a</sup>20–2), for example, Aristotle remarks that to say that 'Forms are paradigms and that other things participate in them is to use empty words and poetical metaphors. For what is it that looks to the ideas when it produces things?'<sup>49</sup>

I agree that Plato does too little to tell us precisely what he means in calling Forms paradigms. But I do not myself find it a misuse of language, or hopelessly metaphorical, to speak of standards and ideals aimed at as paradigms. Moreover, as we have just seen, some things—e.g. the demiurge—do, in Plato's view, work, looking towards Forms.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Cf. also *Top.* 140<sup>a</sup>7ff., where Aristotle claims that calling a law a likeness (*eikōn*) is 'not using the word in any proper sense . . . and with worse effect than any kind of metaphorical language'.

<sup>50</sup> So (see n. 41) in Plato's view forms *are* used in a way that makes them paradigms. Perhaps Aristotle would reply that only some Forms are so used, yet all Forms are supposed to be paradigms. Further, although the demiurge looked to Forms in creating natural kinds, Aristotle would object that particular instances of natural kinds do not involve a craftsman looking to any Forms; as he is fond of saying, a man begets a man. For some discussion, see my 'Forms as Causes', esp. sect. xi. The issue is interestingly discussed by Alexander; see his comments in *Metaph.* on 991<sup>a</sup>20–<sup>b</sup>8, and also the quotation provided by Simplicius, *In Phys.* 310. 25–311. 27 (in which Alexander comments on *Aris. Phys.* 194<sup>b</sup>26).

## 5. Conclusion

We have explored Aristotle's three objections to AR, along with a further objection voiced later in the *Peri ideōn*. The first objection rests on the controversial metaphysical thesis that no relative can be a substance. I suggested that although there are readings of this claim on which it succeeds from Aristotle's own metaphysical perspective, on those readings it fails as an *ad hominem* objection to Plato. Here, as often, the debate between Plato and Aristotle in the end rests on their conflicting metaphysical intuitions.<sup>51</sup>

Aristotle's second objection is that at least the Form of equal will, in violation of U, be reduplicated; for, given SP, the Form of equal must be equal to something and that can only be another Form of equal. SP and U thus conflict, at least in some cases. This objection fails if, as I have suggested, Plato's version of SP is BSP. None the less, the objection is useful, for it forces us to think more clearly about the nature of self-predication than Plato gives us guidance for doing. Aristotle, here as elsewhere, interprets Plato's impressionistic language in one straightforward and intuitive way, and sees what results; if we are to avoid the result, we need to interpret Plato in ways he leaves open but is not careful enough to steer us towards.

Aristotle's third objection is that Plato is committed to the existence of two Forms of unequal, for just the same reason that he is committed to the existence of two Forms of equal; hence U is again violated. Although some commentators argue that Plato is not committed to Forms of opposites, Aristotle seems to me to be right to think that he is. The main criticism of Aristotle's third objection is not that it commits Plato to Forms of opposites, but that, given BSP, Plato can explain the inequality of the Form of unequal without being committed to two Forms of unequal. Aristotle would defend himself against this objection in the same way that he would defend himself against the objection I raised to his second argument.

Aristotle's fourth objection is that Forms turn out to be, impossibly, both paradigms and principles of substances. His argument mingles his two main lines of attack; it depends both on some of his own, un-

<sup>51</sup> In saying this, I do not mean to suggest that neither of them has arguments in support of his intuitions, or that no such arguments can be given; I mean only that this is the fundamental basis of their disagreement, the issue we have to decide about in order to adjudicate between them.

Platonic metaphysical theses, and also on interpreting Plato's impressionistic language in a literal, straightforward way which Plato might not intend but does too little to foreclose. Once again, a decision here rests on large philosophical issues about which Plato and Aristotle have conflicting intuitions; and the choice between them is not easy.

Once we are clear about Aristotle's strategies for interpreting and assessing Plato, however, we should at least not hesitate to view him as a valuable source for understanding Plato's views. True, he does not generally provide verbatim reports of claims to be found in the dialogues. But that is not because he misinterprets those claims; nor yet is it because he has some other source—such as Plato's unwritten doctrines, or work by others in the Academy—in mind. It is because he aims to explain the dialogues in a philosophically illuminating way. If philosophical insight is what we are after, then whether or not we in the end agree with him, Aristotle is hard to beat.

*Cornell University*





# PLATO THE SCEPTIC

JULIA ANNAS

FROM about 273 BC, when Arcesilaus of Pitane took over its headship, until it petered out in the first century BC, Plato's school, the Academy, practised and taught a form of scepticism. This is surprising; even more so is the fact that the Academy regarded sceptical philosophizing as philosophizing in the spirit of Plato, doing what Plato did. Modern scholars tend to regard this as so surprising as to be an aberration, but it was not so regarded in antiquity. Middle Platonists like Plutarch respected and defended the sceptical New Academy.<sup>1</sup> The Neoplatonist commentators, though they disagreed with the thesis that Plato was a sceptic, thought of it as a familiar thesis requiring refutation.<sup>2</sup> Even a hostile figure like Numenius, who regards the New Academy as a ghastly mistake, pays it the compliment of extensive attention.<sup>3</sup>

It is worth our serious attention to ask just what the New Academy were doing when they represented their own sceptical practice as being in the Platonic tradition. The evidence is extensive enough, and

© Julia Annas 1992

A distant ancestor of this paper was read at an Oxford seminar given by myself and Jonathan Barnes. Since then it has gone through many versions; parts of some of these were read at the University of Texas, the Los Angeles area colloquium in ancient philosophy (Pomona), and the Berkeley conference in ancient philosophy. I am most grateful for comments to the audiences on all these occasions, and also to Jonathan Barnes, Lesley Brown, Myles Burnyeat, Alan Code, Stephen Everson, Gail Fine, and James Leshner. My greatest debt is to Gregory Vlastos, whose extensive and generous comments stimulated much reshaping and great improvement, and whose discussions greatly deepened my sense of what is at stake in the attempt to see Plato as part of a sceptical tradition. Whatever value the paper has is due to him.

<sup>1</sup> See J. Glucker, *Antiochus and the Late Academy* (Hypomnemata, 56; Göttingen, 1976), ch. 6; P. Donini, 'Lo scetticismo accademico, Aristotele e l'unità della tradizione platonica secondo Plutarco', in G. Cambiano (ed.), *Storiografia e dossografia nella filosofia antica* (Turin, 1986), 203–26.

<sup>2</sup> This will be discussed below, pp. 62–72.

<sup>3</sup> Numenius, *On the Revolt of the Academy from Plato*, frs. 24–8 des Places (Budé edn., 1973).

ancient scepticism rich and interesting enough, for it to be worth our while to reconstruct the way that the New Academy read Plato, even if it is in the end a way that we do not share.<sup>4</sup>

We are faced with two distinct bodies of evidence. One concerns Arcesilaus and his concern with the figure of *Socrates* and *Socratic* practice. The other deals with *Plato* as a whole without distinguishing between Socrates and Plato, and focuses on arguments in, and features of, the middle and late dialogues. This material ascribes a milder form of scepticism to Plato and probably derives from Philo's later Academy. I shall deal with these two bodies of evidence separately.

### 1. Socrates and scepticism

Arcesilaus, as has been recently stressed, is the inventor of the sceptical Socrates; hitherto Socrates had been an important figure in Hellenistic philosophy, but not in the role of a sceptic. Socrates served as inspiration to the Cynics with their market-place moralizing, and to the more rigorous and argumentative Stoics.<sup>5</sup> Arcesilaus represented his own sceptical philosophizing as a revival of Socratic practice; the interesting question is what he was relying on in this attempt to reclaim Socrates as an uncommitted enquirer rather than as a dogmatic moralist.

It was not Socrates' profession of ignorance.<sup>6</sup> On this point Arcesilaus seems, rather surprisingly, to have got Socrates wrong. Arcesilaus thought that Socrates claimed to know that he knew nothing (*Varro* 45, cf. 16; *Lucullus* 74). But Socrates never says this; he merely says that he knows nothing. The strongest expression he uses is that he is aware of not having knowledge—*sunoida emautōi*, *Ap.* 21B 4–5. But this is not a claim to knowledge on this score. In any case,

<sup>4</sup> I have been greatly helped by recent work by M. Frede ('The Sceptic's Two Kinds of Assent and the Question of the Possibility of Knowledge', in R. Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, and Q. Skinner (eds.), *Philosophy in History* [Cambridge, 1984], M. Burnyeat ('Carneades was no Probabilist', forthcoming), and Paul Woodruff ('The Skeptical Side of Plato's Method', *Revue internationale de philosophie*, 156–7 [1986], 22–37).

<sup>5</sup> The varied influence of Socrates is lucidly discussed by A. A. Long in 'Socrates in Hellenistic Philosophy', *Classical Quarterly*, 38 (1988), 150–71.

<sup>6</sup> Despite Cic. *Varro* 44, where it is said that Arcesilaus started his attacks not out of competitiveness but because of the same obscurity in things that led Socrates to his confession of ignorance. For Democritus, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, and 'nearly all the ancients' are added; no special reference to Socrates can be in mind.

Arcesilaus criticized Socrates on this point, taking an avowal of knowledge that one does not know to be negative dogmatism, a flaw in an otherwise sceptical Socrates. So this cannot be *Arcesilaus'* ground.

Some brief but very informative passages make it clear what the point of connection was that Arcesilaus made. They all come from Cicero, who had studied in the Academy and speaks knowledgeably about its practices.<sup>7</sup> At *De orat.* 3. 67 we find that

First [in contrast to his predecessors in the Academy, who had made no radical changes of teaching method] Arcesilaus, Polemon's pupil, seized on the following in particular out of various writings of Plato and from the Socratic conversations: that nothing sure can be apprehended by either the senses or the mind. He is said to have employed an outstandingly attractive style of speaking in rejecting any judgements of the mind or senses, and to have been the first to set up the practice—though this was highly Socratic—of not showing what he thought but of arguing against what anyone else said that they thought.

And at *Fin.* 2. 2 Cicero says that we can see from Plato how Socrates made fun of the sophists:

He [Socrates] had the practice of drawing out his interlocutors' beliefs by conversation and questioning, so as to say what he thought in response to their replies. This custom was abandoned by his successors, but Arcesilaus revived it, and instituted the following practice: those who wished to hear him should not ask him questions but should themselves tell him what they thought: when they had told him, he would argue against it.<sup>8</sup>

Here we find two points: that Arcesilaus took the results of Socratic practice to be negative, and that he revived what he took to be the Socratic practice of *ad hominem* arguing. Since Arcesilaus criticized Socrates for negative dogmatism, his conclusion that neither the senses nor the mind can grasp anything sure cannot have been itself a piece of dogma, but must represent, in the usual sceptical fashion, his own personal state of conviction on the matter. More interesting is the information about method. Arcesilaus' own practice, as we find

<sup>7</sup> I shall concentrate on Cicero's evidence. There are some fragments from other sources connecting Arcesilaus with Socrates, but they are all inconclusive. They are coupled by Plutarch as having written nothing, and Plutarch tells us that Socrates was one of the respectable ancestors for his philosophizing sought by Arcesilaus, the others being Parmenides and Heraclitus (see fr. 1d Mette). Lactantius (fr. 14b Mette) says that Arcesilaus 'auctore Socrate suscepti hanc sententiam, ut adfirmaret sciri nihil posse'; this seems to be derived from Cic. *De orat.* 3. 67 (immediately below).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Fin.* 5. 10; *De orat.* 3. 80; *ND* 1. 11.

definitively argued by Couissin and others,<sup>9</sup> was to argue only from his opponent's premisses. His way of arguing, that is, was entirely *ad hominem*. What these passages tell us is that this is what he took Socrates to have done as well. I shall follow through seriously this idea: how might Arcesilaus have tried to show that Socrates' practice was indeed totally *ad hominem* like his own, and how might he have dealt with certain obvious difficulties?

First a few words of caution. In good sceptical spirit I shall be arguing here from as few premisses as possible, and so in two respects shall be minimizing my position on Arcesilaus. Firstly, we know more about Arcesilaus' sceptical strategies than just what the two passages above tell us. We know, for example, that he was prominent for leading himself and others to *epochē*, suspension of judgement, on various themes.<sup>10</sup> but in what follows I shall make no use of this; we have no evidence that Arcesilaus claimed that Socrates suspended judgement, and indeed it is hard to see how anyone might have thought this. Similarly with the rest of our evidence; none of it is directly relevant to the point I shall work from, namely Arcesilaus' known commitment to *ad hominem* argument, arguing only from what the interlocutor provides without committing oneself to the truth of the premisses, or indeed the validity of the argument.

Secondly, there is more to Arcesilaus' scepticism than his appeal to Socrates, and the nature of his position is at many points controversial. He was influenced in a Socratic direction by his predecessors in the Academy.<sup>11</sup> He was obviously influenced by desire to oppose the Stoics.<sup>12</sup> And he had *some* relation to Pyrrho, the prototypical sceptic. It has been argued by David Sedley that Arcesilaus had a considerable debt to Pyrrho, which he concealed;<sup>13</sup> more recently Fer-

<sup>9</sup> Couissin's classic article, 'Le stoïcisme de la nouvelle Académie', *Revue d'histoire de la philosophie*, 3 (1929), 241-76, is reprinted in English as 'The Stoicism of the New Academy' in M. Burnyeat (ed.), *The Skeptical Tradition* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1983), 31-63. For some modifications to Couissin's view, see A.-M. Ioppolo, *Opinione e scienza: Il dibattito tra Stoici e Accademici nel III e nel II secolo a.C.* (Elenchos, Collana 12; Naples, 1986). See my discussion review, 'The Heirs of Socrates', *Phronesis*, 33 (1988), 100-12.

<sup>10</sup> See Varro 45 ff., Lucullus 59; Sextus PH 1. 232-4; Numenius fr. 25. 75-82, 26. 104-11 des Places. Cf. P. Couissin, 'L'origine et l'évolution de l'*epoche*', *Revue des études grecques*, 42 (1929), 373-97.

<sup>11</sup> See A. A. Long, 'Diogenes Laertius' *Life of Arcesilaus*', in *Diogene Laerzio storico del pensiero antico* (Elenchos, Collana 7; Naples, 1986), 429-49.

<sup>12</sup> As is stressed most forcefully in Couissin's articles cited above.

<sup>13</sup> D. Sedley, 'The Motivation of Greek Scepticism', in *The Skeptical Tradition*, 9-29.

nanda Decleva Caizzi has argued that he would be aware of Pyrrho only as a figurehead, and a rather eccentric one at that, and aware of sceptical arguments only through Timon, after his own sceptical début.<sup>14</sup> It is an important question how we are to link and to estimate all these influences, but I shall pass it by here, since nothing that I say hinges on having any particular answer to it. Arcesilaus had many interests; but he was first and foremost the head of the Academy, who saw himself as in some way a follower of Plato.<sup>15</sup> We would expect him to have some attitude to Plato, whose books we know he read,<sup>16</sup> and to Socrates. Focusing on his attitude to Socrates and to *ad hominem* arguing is bound to tell us something important about how he and the rest of the sceptical Academy saw themselves as inheritors of Plato's tradition, whatever other influences they also felt.

Finally, I shall write, for the sake of clarity, as though Arcesilaus were a sceptic searching for a pedigree—as though, that is, he already had a sceptical practice and then claimed that this could be found in Socrates. But this is not to claim that this is the only possible *genetic* account. Nothing I say is meant to preclude the thesis that it was reading the Socratic dialogues which made a sceptic out of Arcesilaus in the first place, and gave him the ideas which he then used to interpret Socrates as a sceptic.<sup>17</sup>

What would Arcesilaus have to do to make his interpretation of Socrates plausible? He would have to show, firstly, that Socrates does argue *ad hominem* in the way a sceptic would. He would also have to cope with certain obvious features of Plato's Socrates that stand in the way of such an interpretation. For in Plato's Socratic dialogues Socrates represents himself always as searching for the truth, indeed for knowledge of the truth. He often seems to argue from beliefs which he shares with the interlocutor, rather than being non-committal as to the truth of those beliefs. And, most of all, Socrates has firm and passionately held beliefs of a moral kind—that virtue is a kind of skill, that you have to have it to be happy, and so on. How then can he be a sceptic?

We can best see how Arcesilaus could have coped with these points if we renew our focus on the star evidence, namely the ascription by

<sup>14</sup> F. Decleva Caizzi, 'Pirroniani ed Accademici nel III secolo a.C.', in *Aspects de la philosophie hellénistique* (Entretiens de la Fondation Hardt, 32; Geneva, 1986), 147–83.

<sup>15</sup> This is stressed by Ioppolo, and by Long.

<sup>16</sup> D.L. 4. 32–3; Index Academicus, xix. 13–16.

<sup>17</sup> As is suggested by Long in 'Socrates in Hellenistic Philosophy'.

Arcesilaus to Socrates of *ad hominem* arguing. Why would a sceptic make *ad hominem* arguing prominent anyway?

Ancient sceptics (of all kinds) do not see their task as negative—as that of challenging everybody's claims to know anything, or the claims of one area of enquiry *vis-à-vis* those of another. The ancient sceptic is *skeptikos*, enquiring—he is primarily a seeker after truth. Far from doubting whether there is any knowledge, the ancient sceptic is always eager to find some. Cicero, defending the cause of the later Academy, of which he saw himself as a member, says that

We desire to discover the truth without any dispute, and attempt this with the greatest attention and effort. For even though all our cognition is blocked by many obstructions, and even though there is so much obscurity in the things themselves and weakness on the part of our judgements that both the most ancient and the most learned philosophers have rightly distrusted their ability to discover what they desired, still they did not give in, and neither shall we get worn out and abandon our effort to search things out. (*Lucullus* 7)<sup>18</sup>

But—and there is a big but—knowledge and even true beliefs are hard to come by. Claims to knowledge or to true belief tend to be challenged by opponents (especially in philosophy). The sceptics are impressed by these challenges and if none is available produce some themselves and carry on meeting responses and modifications with fresh challenges. But they do not do so because of any commitment to the idea that there is no knowledge or true belief (nor the idea that there is, but we can never get any). Rather, the sceptic keeps arguing because the difficulties are genuine. He is (at least in principle) open-minded; he wants to have knowledge or at least true belief; it is just that there do always seem to be problems which have not been successfully met. The sceptic sees his opponent, the dogmatist, as the person who gives in too soon; who makes a claim to knowledge or true belief, and then through laziness or stupidity or complacency fails to see the problems involved. Hence for the sceptic the main danger is 'rash assent', premature commitment to a claim about the way things are. This was certainly Arcesilaus' view, as we can see from *Varro* 45, where it is said to be his view that knowledge is so hard to come by that Socrates was wrong even to say that he knew that he did not know; so no one should make any assertion or affirmation or assent to the ways things appear to one. One must always hold back one's rashness from

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Fin.* 1. 2–3 and *Lucullus* 127, the latter somewhat reminiscent of the passages about knowledge in *Republic* 5–7.

every slip, since it is rash to assent to what is false or unclear, and a disgrace to do either of these things. And so the sceptic goes round doing the dogmatist the service of pointing out the problems that his rash assent overlooked—not in the negative spirit of showing that there is no truth here, or that if there is we cannot get it, but (at least in principle) in the co-operative spirit of searching for some truth that is not problematic. The sceptic, then, is distinguished from the dogmatist not by his goal (searching for truth) but by the fact that he is *still* searching, because still aware of the difficulties. The dogmatist is just the one who has given up.<sup>19</sup>

Given that the ancient sceptics are enquiring after truth and are prepared to challenge any claim across the board, it is not surprising that ancient sceptical reasoning will be *ad hominem*, that is, will use only premisses granted by the opponent. We may find this startling, but for the ancient sceptic the main danger is rash assent, and *ad hominem* reasoning is ideally suited to remove this in two ways. Firstly, you directly attack the opponent's rash assent. You take what he accepts and show him that there are problems *just from this*: having located a problem in his beliefs you get him to give up those beliefs. And secondly, you have done this without committing *yourself*. If your argument depends on beliefs of yours, that makes it vulnerable to objections that can be brought against those beliefs. The fewer beliefs of yours your argument rests on, the harder it is for the opponent to avoid by rejecting or attacking those beliefs. Hence for the ancient sceptic, purely *ad hominem* reasoning is the most, not the least, serious kind; it is the most relevant, least vulnerable, and most effective.

We can now see straight away that in ascribing to Socrates his own sceptical practice Arcesilaus was not denying that Socrates was seriously seeking after truth, nor ascribing a disreputable mode of arguing to him. Rather, he was ascribing to Socrates the most serious and wholehearted way, according to an ancient sceptic, of seeking for the truth. We may not agree, of course; we may well think that it is feasible to search for the truth in more positive ways, and that the sceptic is overestimating the difficulties. The point here, however, is that this interpretation makes sense in its own terms; it is the sceptical interpretation of Socrates that we are trying to understand.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Sextus *PH* 1; although this is a Pyrrhonist statement, there is no reason why the Academics should not share it, especially since they were following Plato's recommended practice of enquiry, and were not committed to gaining peace of mind through scepticism. (Cf. next note.)

It is worth noting here that the Academic sceptics did consistently think of themselves as searching for the truth. The Pyrrhonian sceptics complicated this matter by their claims that enquiring after the truth in the rigorous sceptical manner will in fact lead to peace of mind, and that this will bring about a happy life. This creates the problem that it is hard to take this thought seriously without compromising the search for truth; and though the trick can be turned, it is useful for our purposes that the Academic sceptics at any rate never saw themselves as seeking anything but the truth.<sup>20</sup>

We can also see how Socrates might well be seen as someone aware of the need to combat rash assent. For Socrates' interlocutors are typically not people who are wrong, or ignorant. Rather, they are typically complacent or pretentious people who, if they have the right beliefs, have them unreflectively and for the wrong reasons. In the passage from *Fin.* 2. 1–2 quoted in part above Cicero prefaces his account of Arcesilaus reviving Socratic practice with a reminder of how Plato's Socrates makes fun of the sophists. Socrates' deflation of pompous sophists makes it indeed plausible to see him as someone who characteristically attacks those whose rash assent has outrun their grasp of what they are talking about.

It is, however, one thing to see what might make this interpretation plausible to Arcesilaus; it is another to ask, when we step back and examine it on our own account, the question that is bound to occur to us: *Does Socrates in the Socratic dialogues in fact argue ad hominem—solely, that is, from the interlocutor's premisses?*

Sometimes he uncontroversially does so. There is a striking example in the *Hippias Minor*. In this short dialogue Socrates forces the complacent sophist Hippias to the conclusion that the good person is the person who does wrong willingly. Even Hippias sees that this conclusion cannot be right; Socrates contents himself with pointing out that the argument has forced them to it, so that they are in a state of 'wandering around'. On the usual reading of Plato, the *Hippias Minor* has always seemed a rather pointless dialogue. Why does Socrates argue for a conclusion which he patently does not believe? But clearly Socrates is not arguing *for* anything. He picks on Hippias, a vain and complacent person who is a particularly good example of what was later to be called 'rash assent', premature pontificating. Hippias is led by clever manipulation of his incautious

<sup>20</sup> Cf. G. Striker, 'Über den Unterschied zwischen den Pyrrhonern und den Akademikern', *Phronesis*, 26 (1981), 153–71.



beliefs into absurdity. It is left to him (or rather the dialogue ends and it is left to the reader) to work out what has gone wrong, and either to avoid the conclusion by repairing the argument, or avoid coming out with the offending belief in the future.

In the *Hipparchus*<sup>21</sup> Socrates presses a friend on the nature of 'loving gain'. When the friend gets puzzled, Socrates offers him various exits, and points out that it is like making moves in a game of draughts (229E): he can retract premiss A or premiss B or premiss C. It is up to him, in other words; the problems come from the moves that he has made. The friend picks one option, but this leads to a dead end. Again, it is left to the reader to work out what other moves he could have made and whether they could have worked better.

In other dialogues we can find smaller pieces of *ad hominem* reasoning. One of the most striking is the initial series of arguments against Polemarchus in *Republic* 1. Socrates shows Polemarchus that, as he conceives of justice, it is not much use (332C–333A). Worse, that the just man is a kind of thief (333E–334B). The argument does seem to show that, says Polemarchus unhappily (334A). When Socrates goes on to show that on Polemarchus' view of justice it will be just to injure those who do no injustice, Polemarchus protests (334D): there must be something wrong with the argument if it shows that, he says, and adjusts his view accordingly to avoid the unwelcome conclusion.

In all of this Socrates commits himself to no beliefs of his own in the course of the discussion. He goes along with the interlocutor, drawing out beliefs that he is committed to. To reject the conclusion the interlocutor has to fault *his own* argument or reject one of *his own* beliefs; he cannot do so by attacking any of Socrates' beliefs, since Socrates has put forward no beliefs relevant to the matter in hand. This is most blatantly obvious, of course, in the *Hippias Minor* and *Republic* 1; nobody has seriously supposed that Socrates really thinks that the good person is the one who can willingly do wrong, or that the just person is a kind of thief.

We again, stepping back, may think that this is not the whole story. In the *Hippias Minor* Socrates is troubled and seems to point to the need for further investigation.<sup>22</sup> And in *Republic* 1 Socrates goes on to

<sup>21</sup> The reasons for not regarding this dialogue as genuine are feeble. See P. Friedlaender, *Plato*, trans. H. Meyerhoff, ii (New York, 1964), 119–28, 339–42. Philosophers often object to its historical section, but ancient historians (including the *Cambridge Ancient History*) do not share these doubts.

<sup>22</sup> Alan Code has pointed out to me that Socrates puts in a major qualification to his own acceptance of the offensive conclusion; at 376B 4–6 Socrates says that the good

add an argument with Polemarchus which proceeds from very Socratic premisses. That is, once we widen the context of these arguments, we can find reason to doubt that merely *ad hominem* argument is all that is going on. But this does not, of course, undermine the claim that there is a perfectly good *ad hominem* reading of them, which is not forced, and which would fit Arcesilaus' picture of an *ad hominem* Socrates.

It is also hard to think that Arcesilaus did not appeal to a dialogue which is clearly late, but is deliberately Socratic in form—the *Theaetetus*. Here we find that *ad hominem* reasoning has been raised to a feature of Socratic methodology. The point is made explicit by the imagery of Socrates as the barren midwife, and by the constant repetition of the point that Socrates is not putting forward any of his own ideas, but is merely drawing ideas out of Theaetetus to see whether they work out or not. All that happens is that Theaetetus offers various definitions of knowledge; none of them do work; and so he is cured of any complacency on the subject. Socrates gets Theaetetus to see that all his definitions must be rejected because they lead to unacceptable results; he does not himself put forward any beliefs, still less use them to refute Theaetetus. The obviously reasonable way to read the *Theaetetus* is to see Socrates as arguing in it wholly *ad hominem*; though there is a history of attempts to find a hidden doctrinal agenda by those who dislike the *ad hominem* reading.<sup>23</sup>

person will be none other than the person who goes wrong and does shameful and wrong things willingly—if there is such a person.

<sup>23</sup> It seems as though this was first attempted by Middle Platonists against the sceptical Academy's reading. The anonymous commentator on the dialogue (plausibly redated by H. Tarrant to the 1st cent. BC; see 'The Date of Anon. *In Theaetetum*', *Classical Quarterly*, 33 [1983], 161–87) claims that Plato did hold beliefs (col. 55. 8–13) against those who claim on the basis of passages like 150c that 'Plato is an Academic, holding no beliefs' (54. 38: *ek toioutōn lexeōn tines oiontai Akadēmaikon ton Platona hōs ouden dogmatizonta*). The Neoplatonists also read the dialogue this way. The 6th-cent. anonymous *Introduction to Platonic Philosophy* (ed. L. G. Westerink [Amsterdam, 1962]) says that Plato does not demolish all accounts of knowledge in the *Theaetetus*, since he does not himself accept that the soul is like a blank tablet, but thinks of it as needing only purification to attain (non-empirical) truth. Something similar seems to lie behind the odd 'Platonic' arguments retailed by other Neoplatonist commentators against the 'sceptical' claims that knowledge is impossible because everything is in flux (a confused version of the first part of the *Theaetetus*): these are to the effect that Plato accepts what is said about flux, but restricts it to the perceptible realm, above which the soul rises to grasp truth (Ammonius *In Cat. Prooemium* 2. 17–3. 8; Olympiodorus *Prolegomena* 4. 20–5. 6; Philoponus *In Cat. Prooemium* 2. 8–24—in an incomplete and especially confused version). The most influential modern version, which revives many of the Neoplatonist readings, is that of Cornford; more recently John McDowell's translation and notes

Still, this kind of *ad hominem* reasoning is not the norm in the Socratic dialogues. Certainly they all display Socrates knocking down an opponent's claim without putting anything positive in its place. Only in a very few cases, however, is the reasoning *ad hominem* in the sense that all the premisses are supplied by the interlocutor, with Socrates uncommitted. In nearly all arguments Socrates does seem to hold beliefs; indeed he uses them to reject the interlocutor's suggestion. For that is shown to conflict with beliefs which are retained, and which Socrates shares. Laches' suggestion that courage is standing firm, for example, founders because there can be bravery in retreat (190E-191C). The suggestion that it is endurance with knowledge, with which he concurs, founders because people can show more, not less, courage in taking risks when they lack knowledge and skill than in running risks when they have it (193B-C). In all this there is no suggestion that Socrates does not share the belief in question. Indeed, if he does not, it is hard to see how he could share enough beliefs about courage with the interlocutor for them to have a serious discussion as to what it is. And the usual form a 'Socratic elenchus' takes is that of Socrates using common beliefs he and his interlocutors share to show the interlocutor that he has a problem. This is the normal form of a 'Socratic elenchus', whatever further problems remain as to its structure.

If Socrates makes trouble for his interlocutors by appealing to beliefs which they both hold, then he holds, and argues from, some beliefs. If so, it would seem that Arcesilaus must be wrong; purely *ad hominem* reasoning is not characteristic of the Socratic dialogues, even if it occasionally occurs. Given this, the prospects of an overall sceptical reading of these dialogues may well seem dim; and we might feel inclined to reject Arcesilaus' reading as hopelessly selective and unbalanced, and to take the few passages of undeniably *ad hominem* reasoning in other ways. On its own, after all, it hardly implies scepticism. Perhaps Socrates uses it against Hippias in a spirit of personal spite, to make *Hippias* himself look silly. Perhaps he similarly wants to make Polemarchus look foolish; and perhaps he uses it in the *Theaetetus* in a manipulative way, so that Theaetetus' suggestions all founder while the preferred view waits in the wings.

It is possible, I believe, to see how Arcesilaus might have dealt with

express a more moderate view, but still hold that Plato is committed to some beliefs (about perception, for example) which are not presented in the dialogue but explain why some conclusions are rejected in it.

this, and to do so by turning to the source of his third difficulty: the fact that Socrates holds definite and passionate beliefs, particularly moral beliefs.

No one can read the Socratic dialogues and fail to get the impression that Socrates believes, and is as committed as anyone could be to believing, certain theses: that virtue is a kind of skill, that you have to have virtue to be happy, that it is better to suffer than to do wrong, and so on. *Prima facie* these form another stumbling-block in the way of the sceptical interpretation. But Arcesilaus may have been struck by two points about these beliefs.

Firstly, the fact that Socrates has these beliefs emerges in a curiously oblique way from his arguments with others. We get the impression, for example, that Socrates believes that the virtues are some kind of unity (I deliberately leave it indeterminate just what kind, since nothing I say hangs on this) because he attacks arguments to show that the virtues are distinct (in the *Protagoras*) and because some of the arguments he employs, for example at the end of the *Euthyphro* and *Laches*, point that way. But Socrates never clearly formulates these beliefs (or their relationships) in any authoritative way. Nor does he ever put them forward as objects for reasoned debate. We have to work out the structure and exact content of Socrates' ethics for ourselves to a great extent.

Secondly, and as a consequence of this, Socrates never *argues to or from* his substantial moral beliefs. He sometimes claims, notably in the *Gorgias*, that an interlocutor is committed to them, but he never puts forward his own beliefs on his own account either to be examined or as premisses to be argued from. Rather, he goes around examining *other people's* beliefs and seeing what *they* lead to.

But now we get an interesting result. For Socrates tends to appeal to common-sense beliefs which, if these strong Socratic theses are correct, are not true. For example, if Socrates thinks that all the virtues form a unity, then he can hardly share the assumption that founds many of the *Laches'* arguments, that courage is a distinct virtue with its own nature and province. If he is committed to thinking that virtue is in its essence knowledge, then he can hardly endorse the thought that the unskilled divers risking their necks because they do not know what they are doing are actually braver than the skilled. And so if he is committed to these Socratic theses, then the *Laches* arguments, in which beliefs are tested against other beliefs which are retained, can be taken as *ad hominem* after all: Socrates is feeding the interlocutor

premisses which he does not himself share. And what goes for the *Laches* clearly goes for the majority of Socratic arguments. Much Socratic argument seems to rest on assumptions which Socrates cannot straightforwardly share if he accepts the strong Socratic theses. Put somewhat crudely: the more substantial we make Socrates' moral beliefs, the easier it becomes to read his arguments as *ad hominem*, directed against the interlocutor but neither supportive of nor dependent on Socrates' own convictions. Socrates has convictions, but does not bring them into explicit relation with his argumentative practice, which remains negative and directed at the views of others. We can, then, see how Arcesilaus could come to treat all, not just a few, Socratic arguments as *ad hominem*—viz. by treating Socrates as committed to the strong Socratic theses and then explicitly severing them from Socratic argumentative practice.

Arcesilaus' interpretation of the Socratic dialogues thus turns out to be wholly compatible with the undeniable fact that Socrates is presented as committed to substantial dogmatic theses about the unity of virtue and so on; in fact it rests on this. For it is only if we take seriously Socrates' commitment to the substantial theses that we see how to read the arguments in a way that does not have Socrates share the common-sense beliefs that he uses to discomfit the interlocutor. The interlocutor is being shown that his beliefs get him into trouble because of the common-sense beliefs which he has; but Socrates, on the sceptical reading, is not committed to those beliefs. He is always arguing from what the other person accepts.

Three points are worth stressing here. Firstly, to treat all of Socrates' arguments as *ad hominem* is in no way to downgrade the seriousness of those arguments. They serve a serious and useful purpose in demonstrating what is wrong with various people's rash assents. We have seen that this is a genuinely important matter.

Secondly, the seriousness of Socrates' *practice* is not undermined either. For it need not matter whether he himself shares the objections he brings to an interlocutor's thesis. What matters is that the interlocutor be freed from rash assent and come to see what the problems are; and this will not happen until he copes with the objections. Any philosopher will sometimes find herself in the position of urging objections she does not share, just because it is important that her partner in discussion face these objections for herself. One can quite consistently find objections important, and find it important that the interlocutor face them, without sharing them; to reject this is surely to

have a naïve view of the complexity of philosophy. It must be said that this can lead to a kind of concealment: one urges the objections without coming out and saying that one does not share them. But it is not clear that this is objectionable in itself; it depends on the purpose. Usually the purpose will be pedagogical; and Socrates certainly appears always in the position of a teacher, or at least in that of someone who has reflected more, and more effectively, than the interlocutor. A passage in the *Theaetetus* brings this out clearly. In the argument about the role of the senses and the mind in perception at 184–6 Socrates begins by feeding ideas rather openly to Theaetetus, and then checks himself at 184E and insists that Theaetetus answer for himself only in response to questions. Theaetetus duly limits himself to answering questions, and is led to see for himself the crucial point that it is the mind by itself that deals with the ‘common things’ the argument has brought in. Socrates’ response (185E) is delighted: he thought that himself, he says, but he wanted Theaetetus to agree to it for himself. Here Plato is loudly making the point that although Socrates does hold the relevant belief, it is essential to the way he argues that Theaetetus come to discover it for himself, since the whole dialogue examines Theaetetus’ beliefs, without bringing those of Socrates into it. Presumably this is the aspect of Socratic method that Cicero has in mind when he talks of Academics following Socrates in concealing their own views.<sup>24</sup>

Thirdly, such an interpretation does not downgrade the seriousness and importance of Socrates’ commitment to the substantial theses either. We may think that if they are neither based on nor answerable to Socratic arguments, they must be arbitrary, and might as well be held on whim. But this is not so. Compare here the ‘digression’ in the *Theaetetus*. Consistently elsewhere in the dialogue Socrates refuses to put forward any beliefs, limiting himself to testing Theaetetus’ suggestions; this point is stressed to the point of tedium. But in the passage 172B–177C he expresses, eloquently and at length, his opinion that values are not, as Protagoras would have it, relative to the conditions of human life: rather there are objective standards, which form the basis of the good person’s happiness and the evil person’s misery.

<sup>24</sup> *Tusc.* 5. 11. Socrates produced through Plato and others many schools ‘e quibus nos potissimum consecuti sumus, quo Socratem usum arbitrabamur, ut nostram ipsi sententiam tegeremus, errore alios levaremus et in omni disputatione quid esset simillimum veri quaereremus’. He ascribes this to Carneades, not to Arcesilaus, but there seems no problem in reading this feature back.

These ideas are put forward with a confidence that recalls the *Republic*; Plato has no doubt or qualification, even though he underlines the fact that these are counter-intuitive ideas, which will seem silly to most people, for whom the idea of the successful life is totally different. How can this be reconciled with the *ad hominem* nature of the rest of the dialogue? The passage is clearly marked as a digression, independent of the argument, which Socrates and Theodorus leave at the digression's start and return to at the end (173B, 177B-C). Socrates clearly has convictions, of a definite and counter-intuitive kind; but when examining the views of others he keeps his own beliefs out of it. It is clear how Arcesilaus would have welcomed the *Theaetetus* as evidence for a Socrates arguing *ad hominem*, and easy to see how he would extend this interpretation to the early dialogues: Socrates' substantial moral beliefs could be treated as having the status of the *Theaetetus*' digression—passionately held, definite, and counter-intuitive, *but not part of the argument*.

I have suggested how Arcesilaus' interpretation of the Socratic dialogues might be made out as viable. Socrates constantly searches for truth, but does not claim to know any; he has strongly held views, but does not assert these as reasoned defensible theses; he limits his philosophical activity to arguing against the rash beliefs of others, showing them how their own premisses land them in difficulties. This does make the activity of Socrates sound like the activity of Arcesilaus. There is, of course, an important difference. Arcesilaus did not believe, passionately or not, that virtue is needed for the happy life, and so on. Or rather, he *may* very well have followed Socrates in believing these things, but he certainly did not assert them. As Couissin says of him, 'Himself a critic of the ideas of other men, he was unwilling to lay himself open to criticism, and so he kept his thoughts to himself'.<sup>25</sup>

I hope to have shown, working cautiously from what we have good evidence for, how Arcesilaus would have claimed Socrates as a sceptic, and how he would have met the most obvious difficulties: Socrates' quest for truth, the use of shared premisses, and Socrates' firm moral convictions. We have seen how the third, which might well seem the worst problem from a sceptic's point of view, can actually turn to advantage in dealing with the second difficulty.

I turn now from trying to make out Arcesilaus' case to raising two

<sup>25</sup> Couissin, 'The Stoicism of the New Academy', 40.

questions which we, who are not members of the sceptical Academy, are bound to raise.

Firstly, all this has served to show how a sceptic might account for the role of *Socrates* in the Socratic dialogues and the *Theaetetus*. None of this applies to the *Republic* or other middle-period dialogues, which clearly offer no handle to the form of interpretation I have been laying out.<sup>26</sup> But Arcesilaus was head of *Plato's* Academy. Ariston's famous lampoon represented him as a monstrous Chimaera with *Plato*, not *Socrates*, in front, *Pyrrho* behind and so on, clearly a reference to his official position as head of *Plato's* school. Surely he must have had some way of coping with the *Republic*, to take only the most obvious case?

Arcesilaus can hardly have ignored this problem; we know, for example, that he studied 'Plato's books', which can hardly have been limited to the dialogues convenient for him. Annoyingly, we have no good evidence on this matter. We do have evidence of a different kind for the sceptical Academy's interpretation of *Plato*, which I shall present in the second part of the paper; but it is best to keep this distinct from our evidence for Arcesilaus. Perhaps Arcesilaus merely tried to play down the contrast between *Socrates* and *Plato*, by concentrating on a selective reading of the dialogues and simply not paying much attention to inconvenient ones like the *Republic*. If this sounds implausible, we should recall that similarly selective and biased interpretations of *Hume* have been current in much of the twentieth century without raising general complaint. Certainly *Antiochus*, when he made a break with the sceptical Academy, insisted that there was a sharp divergence between *Socrates* and *Plato*, and may have been controverting Academic orthodoxy in so doing. *Antiochus'* view is clear in *Varro* 15ff.: *Socrates* asserted nothing himself, and merely refuted others and spent his time in exhorting others to virtue. (Note that *Antiochus* finds no problem in seeing *Socrates* as a moralist with convictions but no reasoned asserted views.) *Plato*, however, produced a definite body of philosophical doctrine and a system, which *Socrates* would not have approved.

<sup>26</sup> Even among the early dialogues the *Crito* might be thought to be an obvious stumbling-block; *Socrates* points out to *Crito* that their argument depends on a substantial Socratic premiss (49D-E) and this is based on argument (49A-B). However, *Socrates* does not show us these arguments. And the *Crito* is in other ways odd; the Laws do not argue with *Socrates*, but simply order him around and tell him without argument that he has to accept some very contentious theses.



Antiochus, then, draws the distinction in the strongest possible terms (which many, incidentally, would agree with today); possibly when he got so angry with Philo over the *Sosus* incident it was because Philo had explicitly come out and denied any such sharp opposition.<sup>27</sup>

If Antiochus was reacting against an Academic habit of selectively reading Plato in a Socratic way, this makes more significant a passage from the (probably first-century BC) anonymous commentary on the *Theaetetus*; the commentator remarks of the midwife passage and others like it that these passages were taken by some to show that 'Plato [not Socrates] is an Academic, holding no beliefs' (54. 38).

Further speculation is perhaps not useful, because of the lack of evidence. We remain, however, with a feeling of dissatisfaction, wishing we had something more definite.

Secondly, and more importantly, can we seriously accept such an interpretation of Socrates? I have done my best to show that Arcesilaus' sceptical Socrates is not an aberration. We are dealing not with a silly, far-fetched fantasy, but with an interpretation which makes good sense on its own terms. Can we share it?

We have seen that Arcesilaus is quite entitled to hold that all Socratic argument can be seen as *ad hominem*. But he can only do this by taking Socrates not to share the beliefs he uses to create trouble for the interlocutors. He can do this by stressing Socrates' commitment to substantial Socratic convictions, particularly moral ones; for if he holds these, he does not straightforwardly share the interlocutors' beliefs. Arcesilaus, then, has no trouble in ascribing positive, firm, and even passionate beliefs, even of a counter-intuitive nature, to Socrates. But he can do so only at the cost of doing what I called severing them from Socratic argumentative practice. A sceptic can have views and convictions, all right, and can even put them forward with passion. What he cannot do without compromising his scepticism is to put them forward as reasoned theses, to be argued to or argued from. The sceptical interpretation of Socrates only works, then, if we see Socrates' positive beliefs as held in intellectual isolation from his negative argumentative practice. A sceptic keeps his own beliefs out of it when examining those of others; Socrates will only be like Arcesilaus if his positive beliefs bear as little relation to his negative questioning of others' views as did those of Arcesilaus (whatever *they* were).

<sup>27</sup> *Lucullus* 11 ff. See J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (London, 1977), 54ff. Gregory Vlastos has emphasized this point to me.

I have argued that we can indeed find this separation of conviction and argument in the *Theaetetus*, where it is indeed not just accepted but explicitly emphasized as a point of methodology. Socrates, argumentatively the barren midwife, has convictions as firm and as counter-intuitive as what we find in the *Republic*; and this is quite consistent, for the convictions are in a 'digression' explicitly kept out of the argument. Arcesilaus, I suggested, must have read the Socratic dialogues in this way also. Can we? Here the answer can be brief: no. This point can be briefly made, for it is surely not necessary to make it at length. Socrates' methods of arguing in the Socratic dialogues are elusive and hard to systematize; they do not always seem the same, and Socratic methods are often puzzlingly indirect. But nothing warrants us in finding such a radical disjunction of argument and conviction as we find in the *Theaetetus*. We must build up the structure of Socratic ethics with caution and allow for flexibility and anomaly, but it is perverse to deny that it is there, to see in the early dialogues nothing but positive conviction and unconnected *ad hominem* argument.<sup>28</sup>

It is no accident that at several points in reconstructing Arcesilaus' sceptical Socrates I have had to appeal to the *Theaetetus*. It is plausible to see this dialogue as central for Arcesilaus; we can see from the anonymous commentary on the dialogue that it seems to have been the sceptical Academy's star text, and it seems to be the source of much in the direction and concerns of a great deal of Hellenistic epistemology. The problems come in reading the Socratic dialogues in the light of the *Theaetetus*, for in them Socrates does not appear as a barren midwife; his own ideas stand in a relation to his arguments which is complex and elusive, but real. There are problems in interpreting the elenchus, but they cannot be brushed aside by the thought that there is no problem, that we have nothing but *ad hominem* arguments here which themselves show nothing systematic about Socrates' own views.

<sup>28</sup> It is at least worth a mention that scholars who emphasize the 'literary' aspects of the Socratic dialogues are often implicitly accepting something like Arcesilaus' view, particularly if they stress the characters of Socrates' interlocutors and Socrates' occasionally dubious-seeming ways of arguing. If an argument is *ad hominem* then fully to understand it we must know about what the interlocutor thinks, and focus on the actual moves and why they are made, rather than seeing the argument as part of a built-up 'Socratic ethics'. Much recent focus on 'the dialogue form' and treatment of Socratic arguments piecemeal with stress on the particular context implicitly revives Arcesilaus' Socrates. The Academy may even have stressed these literary aspects themselves, since we know that an interest in oratory developed in the Academy, and Socratic arguments provide much material for studying how to (and how not to) convince various types of people.

All this raises a considerable irony. If Arcesilaus' sceptical Socrates can be found in the *Theaetetus*, while we cannot read the *Theaetetus*' methodology back into the early Socratic dialogues, then Arcesilaus has failed to show us a sceptical Socrates, but he has shown us a sceptical Plato. *But* he has shown us a sceptical Plato in just the dialogue where Plato harks back to the Socratic dialogues. And this leaves us with a new twist to the old 'Socratic problem'; but that is another story.

## 2. Plato and scepticism

Cicero in the part of *Varro* which has been preserved first presents Varro putting forward Antiochus' view of the history of the Old Academy. Antiochus, as already stressed (p. 58 above), draws a sharp distinction between Socrates, who argued without coming to systematic or positive results, and Plato, who did, and who in the Antiochean view was the fountain-head of the entire Old Academic, Peripatetic, and Stoic systems, a body of ideas Antiochus proposed to renew and resystematize. Cicero begins his reply on behalf of the legitimacy of the sceptical Academy by defending Arcesilaus as a genuine Socratic enquirer, and then, just before the text breaks off, relates him to Plato. He concedes that the sceptical Academy can be called the 'New Academy' to contrast it with what went before—none the less, he says, it can be called old if we are prepared to make Plato a member of the Old Academy, for in Plato's books 'nothing is assented to; there are many arguments on both sides of a question, and on all matters there is much enquiry, but nothing firm is said'.<sup>29</sup>

Cicero is talking about the whole New Academy from Arcesilaus to Carneades (and possibly beyond), but he makes no allusion to the Socratic practice which I have argued distinguished Arcesilaus' methods. Rather, he is presenting a Plato who is not, as Antiochus claims, a producer of systematic doctrines, but can be seen as a sceptic of a kind, a real precursor of the New Academy. We can see from this exchange, incomplete as it is, how both dogmatists and sceptics claimed that Plato really belonged in their tradition, and what Cicero says indicates how the sceptics might have done it. Because the speech breaks off, we cannot tell how this kind of claim about Plato was

<sup>29</sup> *Varro* 46: 'cuius in libris nihil affirmatur et in utramque partem multa disseruntur, de omnibus quaeritur, nihil certi dicitur'.

related to the evidence about Arcesilaus' Socratic practice; in any case we shall see that there are good reasons for keeping the two separate.

There are three claims made here: that in Plato's works nothing is assented to; that he often argues on both sides of a question; and that he presents enquiry rather than firm statement. How are we to distinguish the first from the third? Most plausibly, the first concerns the form of Plato's writings: claims made in the dialogues are not prefaced by expressions of certainty, but are put forward with hesitations and hedges. The third claims that in fact what is being done in the dialogues is enquiry rather than the putting forward of statements.<sup>30</sup>

These claims reappear in fuller form and with some additions in an anonymous Neoplatonist commentator, dated by the editor L. G. Westerink, to the sixth century AD, in the school of Olympiodorus. In his *Introduction to Platonic Philosophy* the commentator puts forward and discusses five arguments for considering Plato to be a sceptic. The Neoplatonist commentators in general feel the need to rebut the claim that Plato was a sceptic, but usually they do so very briefly, in the course of listing the sceptics along with other schools of philosophy in a standard introduction to Plato or Aristotle.<sup>31</sup> Further, they seem not very interested in scepticism, confusing Academic and Pyrrhonist positions and often muddling them in with material about Protagoras and flux from the first part of the *Theaetetus*.<sup>32</sup> Anonymous, however, is not only much fuller than the others but much clearer; he explicitly mentions the New Academy and lays out clearly five arguments which could plausibly have been put forward in the New Academy. We should be cautious,<sup>33</sup> but we should also consider Anonymous an important source on this issue.

<sup>30</sup> There is some support for this in the way the arguments are organized in the Neoplatonist commentator discussed below.

<sup>31</sup> Anonymous does so in an introduction to Platonic philosophy; Olympiodorus, Ammonius, Elias, Philoponus, and Simplicius all do so in their introduction to Aristotle's *Categories*.

<sup>32</sup> Philoponus calls the founder of the sceptics Pyrrho, and does not seem to realize that it is the sceptical *Academy* that is in question. Elias, Ammonius, Philoponus, and Olympiodorus all refer to *akatalēpsia*, characteristic of the New Academy. Ammonius, Philoponus, and Olympiodorus all add considerations about flux which are evidently a confused reminiscence of the first part of the *Theaetetus*. Sometimes scepticism is assimilated to Protagoreanism, sometimes clearly distinguished from it. Plato's alleged arguments against scepticism often include a 'self-refutation' argument deriving from the *Theaetetus*' self-refutation argument against Protagoras. Clearly by this period there was little serious interest in getting right just what scepticism is.

<sup>33</sup> Anonymous talks of 'the New Academy' and *akatalēpsia*, and uses 'Academic' correctly for 'sceptic'. But he also uses *ephektikoi*, a word used by the other commentators for sceptics in general.

The five arguments are:

[1] In his discussion of things, they say, he uses certain adverbs indicating ambivalence and doubt—e.g. ‘probably’ and ‘perhaps’ and ‘maybe’; and that is a mark not of one who knows but of one who fails to apprehend any precise knowledge. . . . [2] They argue secondly that inasmuch as he tries to establish contrary views about the same things he clearly extols inapprehensibility (*akatalēpsia*)<sup>34</sup>—for example, he tries to establish contraries when discussing friendship in the *Lysis*, temperance in the *Charmides*, piety in the *Euthyphro*. . . . [3] Thirdly, they say that he thinks that there is no such thing as knowledge, as is clear from the fact that he refutes every account of knowledge in the *Theaetetus*, as well as number; how can we say that someone like this extols apprehension? . . . [4] Their fourth argument is this: if Plato thinks that knowledge is twofold, one sort coming through perception and the other through thought, and if he says that each sort falls down, it is clear that he extols inapprehensibility. For he says, ‘We do not see or hear anything accurately; our senses make errors’; and again he says of objects of thought that ‘Our soul is entangled with this evil, the body, and cannot think of anything.’ . . . [5] This is their fifth argument: they say that he himself says in his dialogue, ‘I know nothing and I teach nothing: all that I do is raise problems’. See how he says in his own words that he has no apprehension.<sup>35</sup>

There is overlap between Cicero and Anonymous. Both mention the arguments that Plato uses expressions appropriate to doubt and hesitation, and that he argues on both sides of some questions. These are the most interesting arguments, and I shall concentrate on them; the others can be dismissed more quickly.

Cicero’s third argument is too general to lend itself to detailed discussion. He is pointing to a very general feature of the Platonic dialogues; although they are full of very definite and strongly held claims, they have two features which distinguish them from most works of philosophy. They are all in the dialogue form; Plato never speaks in his own voice, and so all the dialogues are in form reports of

<sup>34</sup> The Academic sceptics argued against the Stoics, who thought that there could be ‘apprehension’ (*katalēpsis*), which we can take to be knowledge of particular facts (as opposed to *epistēmē* or knowledge proper, systematic understanding of a body of beliefs). What is being ascribed to Plato here is a rebuttal of claims to knowledge (not a claim that there is no knowledge).

<sup>35</sup> Anon. ed. Westerink, pp. 205–6 Hermann. The translation is that in J. Annas and J. Barnes, *The Modes of Scepticism* (Cambridge, 1986), 13, with some additions by Annas. The reader should be warned that the present paper is a divergence by Annas from the Annas–Barnes position on this issue in the book. That position is further defended by H. Maconi, ‘Nova Non Philosophandi Philosophia: A Review of Anna Maria Ioppolo, *Opinione e scienza*’, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 6 (1988), 231–53.

enquiry carried on by two or more people, not reports of conclusions argued for and arrived at by Plato. The total effect is to distance Plato from his works, and to present them to us as discussions which are to stimulate us to continue them, rather than as reports of doctrines for us to assimilate. This is in general true; Plato is certainly different in this regard from Epicurus, say. But it is not so clearly true of some of the late dialogues; and it has certainly not stopped generations of scholars and philosophers, from the Middle Platonists to Shorey, from finding in Plato a system of doctrines. This kind of consideration, then, cannot be decisive.

Anonymous's third argument appeals to the *Theaetetus*, taken to express Platonic rather than distinctively Socratic views. We have already seen why the *Theaetetus* was a star dialogue for sceptical interpretations of Plato. But one dialogue on its own, whether taken as Socratic or Platonic, cannot determine how we interpret all of Plato's writings. Anonymous himself claims that Plato does not share the assumptions about knowledge that the *Theaetetus*' arguments rest on—a move found tempting, as we have seen, from the Neoplatonists to Cornford (n. 22 above).

The fifth argument appeals to passages in the dialogues where Socrates (taken as unproblematically representing Plato) denies that he has any knowledge or that he teaches; he merely raises problems. Despite the claim to be giving Plato's own words, Anonymous does not give any passage verbatim—though shortly afterwards he says that 'Plato' says that he knows nothing except one small thing, 'giving and receiving an argument', by which he means dialectic; and this indicates that the passage he mainly has in mind is *Theaetetus* 161B. There, Socrates, asked by Theodorus for a refutation of a statement just made, says that he is not a bag of arguments; what goes on in a Socratic conversation is just that Socrates draws out arguments from his interlocutors. The only knowledge he has is this small item, the ability to do this.<sup>36</sup> Since it is the *Theaetetus* that is mainly in mind, we can object again that we are not entitled to interpret all the dialogues in the light of this one. Anonymous cites from other dialogues passages which show that dialectic is sometimes conceived of as a way to knowledge, not merely as the raising of problems and examination of the views of others. He adds the interesting claim that when

<sup>36</sup> *Egō de ouden epistamai pleon plēn brakheōs, hoson logon par' heterou sophou labein kai apodexasthai metriōs.* Anonymous simplifies this to *plēn oligou tinos, kai touto tou lambanein logon kai didonai.*

Socrates says that he knows nothing he is not denying that he has any knowledge, but denying that he has the kind that only the gods can have. Measured against the divine ideal, he has nothing; but in human terms he can have quite a lot. Recently Gregory Vlastos has defended a similar interpretation of Socrates' profession of ignorance;<sup>37</sup> and possibly Anonymous is extending the point to Plato, who in the *Timaeus* stresses that the account he is giving is the best that mortals can do, but far from the exact truth.<sup>38</sup>

The fourth argument seems to have the *Phaedo* in view, this being the dialogue where Plato both disparages the senses most violently and expresses most strongly the view that the soul is hindered and clogged in its search for philosophical knowledge by its connection with the body. The alternative as posed by Anonymous's source is Hellenistic in form, and reminiscent of many of Sextus' arguments: knowledge must come empirically, through the senses, or by thinking, through the soul or mind; if neither is feasible, there is no knowledge. But Anonymous himself points out intelligently why this posing of the alternatives does not capture what Plato is saying. For even in the *Phaedo* Plato does not say that the senses are cognitively useless; they represent to us the way perceived objects are like all right, and their limitation is that they do not on their own convey the essences (*ousiai*) of things. Knowledge for Plato requires grasp of a thing's essence, and this can only be done by thought. In the *Phaedo* this is the task of the mind when it is 'purified' and freed from the body, and Plato stresses the difficulty of doing this; but he is setting the standards for knowledge high, not denying that it can ever be attained. (We could say the same of the programme of *Republic* 5–7. Plato is sketching an ideal of knowledge which nobody, as things are, will in fact attain. We can see how the sceptical Academy might lay stress on this latter point and take Plato's message to us to be that the best we can ever achieve is to carry on enquiring. But it is equally legitimate to take the force of these books to be that, since there is knowledge, we should strive for the ideal conditions in which we could come near to attaining it.)

The two most interesting arguments are the two that Cicero and the Anonymous share. Of these the more surprising is the argument that

<sup>37</sup> G. Vlastos, 'Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 35 (1985), 1–31.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. 29B–D. At 40D–E he appeals to the 'sons of gods' for the stories about the gods; this seems to be ironical, but it turns up, apparently seriously, as a ground for taking Plato to be a sceptic at D.L. 9. 72.

Plato is a sceptic because he often argues to establish both sides of an issue. What is in question is a familiar sceptical strategy. The sceptic picks on an interlocutor's rash assertion that something is F. He argues convincingly against its being F. Then he argues equally convincingly *for* its being F. The interlocutor is thus brought to a state of 'equipollence' (*isostheneia*): every ground for holding it to be F is matched by an equally strong ground for holding it to be not-F. The result is *epochē*, suspension of judgement: the interlocutor finds that as a matter of fact he can now no longer assert either that it is F or that it is not-F; he has become detached from any commitment on the matter (even if it still *appears* to him more plausible that it is F). The sceptic's aim is to do this for every case of rash assent (his own included).<sup>39</sup>

But how could anyone ascribe this mode of arguing to Plato? In the Socratic dialogues Socrates often reduces his interlocutor to bafflement, admission of defeat, or silence, but never to suspension of judgement. However, the argument here does not particularly concern the Socratic dialogues, and the key is to be found in the form of words that the sceptic uses to describe the results of argument. The sceptic in a state of equipollence declares that the thing is 'no more F than not-F'; he makes it clear that he is not making a claim about the thing, saying that it is both, or neither; he is simply recording his own mental condition of equipollence on the matter. The sceptic uses the phrase 'no more' (*ou mallon*) in a sceptical sense. (Cf. Sextus *PH* I. 188–91.)

Plato sometimes uses the *ou mallon* description of the upshot of an argument (*Theaet.* 182E 10, 181E 5–7, *Meno* 78E 6, *Rep.* 340B 3–5); but it cannot be given the sceptical reading, for Plato is describing not equipollence, but the result that the thing in question has been shown to be not-F. But he does recognize sceptical argument to equipollence, and the use of 'no more F than not-F' to describe the result. He does not, however, describe it approvingly. In *Republic* 7, discussing the undesirable effects of premature practice of dialectic, he says that if you get used to refuting people too soon, you will acquire the view that anything is 'no more fine than foul, and the same with just and good and whatever else is esteemed' (538D 6–E 2). Plato finds it dangerous to think, as the Pyrrhonist sceptics at least later did, that on any matter one should expect the arguments pro and con to come out

<sup>39</sup> On these features of sceptical reasoning see Annas and Barnes, *The Modes of Scepticism*.



even. Thinking this, for Plato, makes you irresponsible, aggressive, and negative in argument.

However, this happens when you do dialectic *too soon*, with the wrong attitudes. Finding that there is as much to be said con as pro *can* be salutary. For, as we find in a famous passage of *Republic* 7 (523–5), some things stir the mind to think while others do not. Our experience never reports that a finger is also the opposite of a finger, and so we are not stirred to wonder what a finger is. But some concepts do—and the concepts that have this desirable feature of getting us to start thinking are those that have opposites, precisely because it is only in these cases that we can find that there is as much to be said for a thing's being not-F as for its being F. It is when something 'is seen to be no more one than many' that we think, and ask ourselves what is one, and what is many. It turns out, then, that equipollence can be no bad thing—the resulting intellectual discomfort stirs us to think in a way that leads us out of the original problem. The premature dialectician is wrong not in arguing to equipollence, but in remaining satisfied with the resulting discomfort rather than enquiring further.

On this point no ancient sceptic would disagree with Plato; as stressed, ancient sceptics are enquirers, and think that finding difficulties should stir us to enquire more.<sup>40</sup> The sceptic parts company only when Plato announces what the mind discovers—intellectually graspable essences or Forms which, when we understand them, take the sting out of the original problem as to the 'contradictions in perception'. For the sceptic, this is the typical fault of dogmatism: giving up too soon, staying complacently satisfied when there are further problems to enquire into. But for Plato, insistence on further enquiry, when one has found intellectually satisfying results, is immature; it is to avoid just this that he insists that the Guardians do years of study before launching into dialectic. So, though we can find Plato arguing to equipollence, it is not for him, as it is for the sceptics, part of a continuing enquiry; it is limited to cases where the senses provide grounds for equipollence, and it leads us to use our minds to grasp Forms. In keeping with this, when he uses the form of words 'no more F than non-F', he does not, unlike his premature dialecticians, give it the sceptical reading: things which are not more F than not-F are *both* F and not-F, a cognitive deficiency not shared by Forms. Burying one's parents is no more fine than foul—that is, it is both

<sup>40</sup> In a way compatible with suspending judgement on the original problem, of course.

(*H. Ma.* 293B 5–8); shame is no more good than bad—that is, it is both (*Chrm.* 161B 1–2); the many beautifuls, justs, etc. at *Rep.* 5, 479A–B, are no more beautiful than ugly, just than unjust, etc.—that is, they are both, and belief or *doxa* is the state of mind of finding them to be both.

The so-called ‘argument for opposites’ has attracted a great deal of attention in recent Platonic scholarship, and much attention has been paid to the fact that in the passages where Plato argues for Forms he does so from the inadequacies, in their application to empirical things, of terms that have opposites. One result of this is that Forms will only be generated for terms that have opposites; yet Plato nowhere welcomes or even recognizes such a limitation. The role of opposites in these passages becomes more comprehensible, I think, if we see Plato as making a non-sceptical application of a form of argument which, if applied in a different spirit, leads to equipollence and suspension of judgement—as indeed we find it doing in later sceptics like Sextus.<sup>41</sup>

However, our result is that while Plato does sometimes argue on both sides of an issue, and even urge that we be led to equipollence, this has no tendency to show him to be a sceptic; he rejects the sceptical attitude to this kind of argument, and uses it in his own case to establish the conclusion that there are Forms which the mind can grasp—a quintessentially dogmatic conclusion. Thus the sceptical Academy were on weak ground here: they were pointing to a form of argument shared by Plato and by the sceptics, but not to any real community of application. We find here a sceptical root of Plato’s major metaphysical claim, something certainly of interest, and arguably often neglected; but we do not find a sceptical Plato.

The final argument appears, in Anonymous’s version, initially puzzling. Firstly, it seems to ignore the obvious: Plato’s works are in dialogue form, and expressions of doubt indicate the interlocutor’s attitude, not Plato’s. We are presumably to take him to refer to Socrates’ statements, and to have in mind the middle and later dialogues, where Socrates is represented as putting forward definite and positive statements, but usually with some disclaimer of this kind.

<sup>41</sup> I have in considering this argument freely used Pyrrhonist sources, since they are the only informative ones. We know that among the Academic sceptics Arcesilaus at least argued to *epochē*, and it has been argued by Couissin that the Academy was the source of the notion of suspension of judgement (above, n. 10), but it is not clear exactly how it fits in with known Academy practice. I have therefore used the explicit and lucid account of equipollence and suspension in Sextus.

Why, however, should such qualifications as 'probably' and 'perhaps' show that Plato is a *sceptic* of any kind? Surely a dogmatist can qualify his claims without becoming a sceptic?

Once again we find that sceptics made a distinctive use of these phrases. Sextus tells us that the sceptic uses phrases like these not merely to qualify an assertion and make it more modest, as a dogmatist would, but rather to indicate that the sceptic is not really *asserting* anything, but merely indicating what appears to him to be the case, but without commitment to its truth.<sup>42</sup> That is why I have taken Anonymous's first argument, about the use of certain phrases, to be the same as the first point mentioned in Cicero, that in Plato nothing is *asserted*; use of certain words indicates scepticism only if they are used to convey a sceptical detachment from what is put forward. This argument, then, amounts to the claim that, however dogmatic in content are statements that we can find in Plato, they are put forward with qualifications which distance the speaker (and author, here fused) from commitment to their truth.

Is there anything to this claim about Plato? It seems clearly aimed at the middle and later, rather than the Socratic dialogues, since only in the former does Socrates put forward definite and positive statements which look like Platonic doctrine. It is certainly true that we find this kind of verbal qualification, and the bolder the metaphysical claim, the more insistent the qualification. In the *Phaedo*, for example, Socrates never says that he knows that the soul is immortal; he puts this forward as the thesis which has stood up best to argument and which he cannot help accepting as true, even though he never convinces all the interlocutors. In the *Republic* the account of the Form of the Good, and with it the ambitious metaphysical sketch of the central books, is said by Socrates to be only his own poor and inadequate beliefs on the subject, far from knowledge (506B-D).

But is Plato indicating sceptical detachment, or merely a modest attitude to doctrine? Certainly Anonymous retorts that Plato employs these expressions for accuracy, not to indicate real hesitation; and this was in general the Neoplatonist response, especially as regards the *Phaedo*.<sup>43</sup> In the absence of other, unmistakable signs that an author is

<sup>42</sup> Sextus *PH* 1. 194-5. Sextus cites the expressions *tacha*, *exesti*, and *endekhetai*; Anonymous, the expressions *eikos*, *isōs*, and *takh' hōs oimai*. Again I am using a Pyrrhonist source to illuminate Academic practice, for lack of good Academic sources on this; I do not think it misleading.

<sup>43</sup> Olympiodorus in his commentary on *Phaedo* 69d 5 tells us that Ammonius wrote a

a sceptic, use of these expressions is surely most naturally taken to indicate, not detachment from the content of what is asserted, but simply a qualification of a modest kind, either as to things being exactly as claimed, or to one's certainty on the topic. If there were such powerful independent arguments for the Plato of the middle dialogues really being a sceptic, then the well-marked hesitation of Socrates when coming out with strong metaphysical statements could be taken in a way consistent with scepticism. Plato would then be seen as an enquirer, who works out various positions by argument and puts them forward not as fixed doctrines for pupils to learn, but as what seems the best position reached by argument so far. The qualifications would indicate that, however convinced Socrates is of the soul's immortality or the importance of the Good, these positions are provisional, in that the argument is still going on: Socrates puts forward one side, but is aware that there are difficulties that can be raised on the other. The dialogues, even the 'metaphysical' ones, do not present us with doctrines, but invite us to continue the arguments. This is undoubtedly an attractive picture of Plato's middle dialogues (and one which in fact has more influence on the actual philosophical activity of most modern scholars than the doctrinal Plato). But it cannot on its own persuade us to read Plato this way. We can see how the sceptical Academy, especially when it had established a long tradition of non-doctrinal philosophical activity, would read Plato this way, to bring him into their own tradition. (Although in fact they did not continue Plato's own arguments very much, as far as we know; they concentrated on contemporary philosophy, and on arguing with their own most powerful contemporaries, the Stoics.) But we, with no such motive, are not likely to find this the best reading of the *Phaedo* and *Republic*.<sup>44</sup>

The reasonable conclusion, then, is that the arguments in Cicero and Anonymous are too weak or inconclusive to make it plausible to read Plato as a sceptic. We can see the lines on which the sceptical Academy read Plato's middle and later dialogues; and while they

monograph on this passage to refute the idea that Socrates is really in doubt about the soul. In his note on 72D 7 Olympiodorus repeats the point that Socrates' expressions of doubt do not express real doubt on the issue.

<sup>44</sup> This is not to say, of course, that we must read Plato as simply enquiring or simply reporting doctrines. Any sensitive reading of the *Phaedo* will find in it the stimulus to further examination of the issues. But it will also find much that Plato is committed to; and a sceptical reading has to make Plato consistently reject presentation of doctrine.

emphasize a stimulus to further enquiry, and a qualification of his claims, which are often missed in studying Plato, the interpretation is just not plausible as an attempt to show that Plato is never dogmatic, never wants us to accept doctrines that he has argued for. Here Sextus appears to be right (*PH* 1. 221–3): to show that Plato is a sceptic one has to show that he never puts forward doctrines, and that is an implausible position. Showing that here and there he advocates further enquiry, or that he hedges his claims, is not to the point.

There is one further point of interest about this final argument, however. It turns up in a confrontation between the *late* Academy and Antiochus; and we can see how it is compatible with a weaker form of scepticism than that of Arcesilaus. Arcesilaus' version of Socratic practice involves detachment from all beliefs; but by the time of the late Academy under Philo Academics had, by dint of constant argument on various issues, settled into the view that some positions were more strongly supported by argument than others: continued debate just did not turn up as good considerations on the other side. An Academic sceptic could thus take the line that some beliefs were more convincing or plausible than others, in the sense that any reasonable person, exposed to all the arguments, would come down on their side rather than that of the opposite. But it now became hard to distinguish this kind of modified sceptic from a suitably modest and qualified dogmatist, who put forward his claims with the backing of powerful argument, but without claiming that they were certainly true. In this situation the only thing that distinguished a sceptic from a Stoic, say, on some topic, was that the former would insist that despite finding the position convincing, and supported by the best available argument, he would still detach himself from commitment to its truth—something that even the most modest Stoic would not do. In this context the sceptics' use of expressions to distance themselves from commitment to the truth of what they asserted would acquire a special importance. And it may be that the ascription of this sceptical use of expressions of doubt to Plato represents the weaker scepticism of the late Academy under Philo. While it is consistent with Arcesilaus' revival of Socratic method, it does not seem to belong in the same climate of scepticism. And, while dating or even tracing developments in the sceptical Academy is hazardous, it at least appears to me to be the case that the sceptical Academy began with a return to a sceptical version of Socratic practice, and that it was probably only later, when their scepticism had become considerably

mitigated, that they claimed the Plato of the middle dialogues as a sceptical ancestor.

In conclusion, we have found that the sceptical Academy's attempt to see themselves as the true heirs of Plato was not silly or far-fetched; it made sense of both scepticism and of Plato. But it is in the end too selective to be convincing as a reading of Plato as a whole; and it is more complex, and involves more varied conceptions of scepticism, than is sometimes thought.

*Columbia University*

# SILENCE AND IMITATION IN THE PLATONIC DIALOGUES

L. A. KOSMAN

## I. Platonic silence

FIRST a bit of *recusatio*. There is an important paper waiting to be written about discursive gaps in the dialogues, about those parts of the dramatic space created by Plato of which the dialogues make us aware but say nothing, those parts of the *histoire* about which the *discours* is silent. Such a paper might well be entitled 'Silence in the Platonic Dialogues'. There is another paper by the same title about the silent onlookers in the dialogues, those figures of whose presence we are made aware, but who say nothing in the course of the conversation. What is Thrasymachus thinking during the last nine books of the *Republic*, and what is his facial expression when Socrates finally refers to him again in book 10?

The silence to which the title of this paper refers, however, is a different silence; it is *Plato's* silence, the fact that nowhere in the Platonic dialogues does their author speak. This is a notable fact about Plato's writings, though not a fact always noted about them; what we encounter when we read a Platonic dialogue is the speeches, arguments, musings, questions and answers, theories and conjectures of a variety of fictional characters speaking in a variety of fictional voices ('he feigneth many honest burgesses of Athens', as Sidney puts it).<sup>1</sup> But no character by the name of *Plato* is among them; even when a

© L. A. Kosman 1992

<sup>1</sup> Or as Dickens or Eliot might say, 'He do the police in different voices'. The entirety of Sidney's remarks should remind us how old is the recognition of Plato as a philosophical poet: 'And truly, even Plato, whosoever well considereth, shall find that in the body of his work though the inside and strength were philosophy, the skin as it were and beauty depended most of poetry. For all standeth upon dialogues; wherein he feigneth many honest burgesses of Athens to speak of such matters that, if they had been set on the rack, they would never have confessed them; beside his poetical describing the

dialogue is reported by a narrative voice, as the *Republic* is, that voice is not Plato's, but the voice of another dramatic character.

In this, Plato is not unique; we have no direct statements of Euripides, or of Aristophanes (naïve theories about the parabasis notwithstanding), or of Plautus or Shakespeare, or for that matter of Archilochus or Horace. But these authors are playwrights and poets, and their silence is due to the fact that no documents have survived outside their *literary* works, no examples, that is, of direct discourse. The author of the Platonic dialogues, however, is a philosopher, and his silence in *philosophical* texts is of a different order, and more remarkable.

Contrast our experience in reading Aristotle; it seems to us to be Aristotle himself who speaks in his written words. Of course he speaks to us only indirectly and through their mediation, but there is, as it were, no *further* mediation between him and these words. The arguments of the *Metaphysics* seem to be Aristotle's not simply in that he *created* them; it is he himself, we feel, who is *speaking* them.

But in the Platonic dialogues there is the constant mediation of a series of interlocutors who alone do the speaking. Even if it were true, as I do not think it is, that Plato meant us to take the views of Socrates or of the Eleatic Stranger as his in an unqualified sense, this would mean simply that a character in a dialogue is Plato's spokesperson, not that it is he speaking; the voice of Socrates would then be thought to speak *for* Plato, but it could not be imagined to be the voice *of* Plato. In this sense Plato is among the most *cryptic* of philosophers; whatever he may reveal to us through his written words, a component of that revelation is the fact of his standing hidden and silent behind them.

## 2. The Platonic dialogue as dramatic

This is surely a noteworthy fact about Plato, even though an obvious one. Here is a philosopher who speaks only through the projected and paraphrastic voice of dramatic characters engaged in dramatic discourse, who never breaks his authorial silence to step forward and speak to us over the footlights. Here is a philosopher, we might say,

circumstances of their meetings, as the well ordering of a banquet, the delicacy of a walk, with interlacing mere tales, as Gyges' Ring and others, which who knoweth not to be flowers of poetry did never walk into Apollo's garden' (Sir Philip Sidney, *The Defense of Poesy*, ed. Albert Cook [Boston, 1890], 3).



who is a dramatic playwright, and a playwright without the benefit of a parabasis.

Perhaps then it is not Plato's *silence* I should be discussing at all, but rather his *ventriloquy*, if we may style it that. I mean the ventriloquy we call drama, or more generally, literature: not the simple renunciation of or withdrawal from speech, but the *displacement* of speech, its *projection* into a created other, a *dummy* (imitation, mute, substitute) who is the truly silent partner in the act despite the fact that it is he who speaks. For he speaks only by means of the author's act of original and primal metonymy, the translocation of literary creation.

This fact about Plato may not be unique even among philosophers. Imagine a theory according to which the Platonic dialogues constitute an instance of a distinguished, though perhaps small, class of philosophical writings which are *dramatic* in this sense, characterized by the literary ventriloquy in which an author speaks through a dramatic persona. This class of writings may be thought to include, in addition to the Platonic dialogues, the dialogues of Anselm or of Hume, the pseudonymous writings of Kierkegaard, and such works as Lucretius' poem *On the Nature of Things*.

These works are to be contrasted, on such a theory, with the great majority of philosophical writings, which are not dramatic in this sense, but of a more direct discursive nature, revealing the minimal mediation that we associate with the writings of Aristotle, Descartes, or Kant. Such a theory, however, takes us well beyond Plato; the fact for Plato remains that he does not speak, that is, does not speak directly, in his dialogues. What are we to make of this silence?

### 3. Narration and imitation

Let us think first, however, about imitation. We may put the fact about the Platonic dialogues which I have just noted differently and more Platonically; the Platonic dialogues, we may say, are *mimetic* in a sense explained early in the *Republic* (*Rep.* 3, 392Dff.). For the distinction which I have invoked is a distinction that Plato has Socrates introduce there. Speaking with Adeimantus about what kind of poetry will and will not be allowed in the fantastic political system that the characters of this dialogue are imagining, Socrates distinguishes between two types of narrative style.

On the one hand, he says, poets may accomplish their narrative

ends by a straightforward mode of narrative presentation which Socrates calls *haplḗ diēgēsis*, straight narration or narration proper. This mode of narrative style is one in which, as Socrates says, 'the poet himself speaks, without attempting to turn our attention elsewhere as though someone else than he were the speaker' (*Rep.* 3, 393A 6-7).

On the other hand, poets may accomplish their narration through what Socrates calls *mimēsis*, using the same word which is so important in the discussion of book 10 of the *Republic*, which Aristotle, although in the context of a radical and interesting transformation, will make much of in the *Poetics*, and which from there will enter the tradition of Western discourse on literature and art as the concept of *imitation*. A poet is said to accomplish his narration by *mimēsis* or imitation in that he imitates or takes on the persona of someone else, speaking as though he were that person, creating a fictional voice through which the narration is accomplished.

In the mimetic mode, then, the poet conceals himself and, by an act of impersonation, submerges his being with and beneath that of a persona. But if in his discourse, as Socrates says, the poet *mēdamou heauton apokruptoito*, 'nowhere hides himself away from us', that discourse constitutes narration without imitation (*Rep.* 3, 393C 11 ff.).

Socrates illustrates the difference between the two styles by reminding Adeimantus of the opening of the *Iliad*; the poet, having first described in narrative Chryses' approach to the Achaeans 'speaks as though he himself were Chryses, trying as hard as possible to make it seem to us that it is not Homer who is speaking, but the priest, an old man' (*Rep.* 3, 393A 8 ff.).

Socrates does not imitate Homer imitating Chryses; he merely *narrates* that Homer does. But he then goes on to show Adeimantus what it would be like if Homer had spoken *without* imitation, and this Homer, a fancied Homer who does not imitate but merely narrates, Socrates imitates. Rather than imitating Socrates' simple narration of Homer's imitation, I shall take the liberty of imitating both Homer and Socrates imitating Homer, in order to allow us better to compare the two styles. Here then is Homer imitating Chryses (as well as Agamemnon):

'Sons of Atreus and other well-greaved Achaeans,  
may the gods who have their homes on Olympus grant to you  
to sack the city of Priam and return home safely;  
but may you release my child to me and accept this ransom  
honouring the son of Zeus, far-shooting Apollo.'

At this, all the other Achaeans spoke and agreed  
 to respect the priest and accept the shining ransom;  
 but it did not please Agamemnon son of Atreus in his heart;  
 he sent him away roughly and laid upon him a strong command:  
 'Let me not come upon you, old man, by the hollow ships,  
 either lingering now or coming back again later,  
 lest the staff and fillets of the gods do you no good.  
 Her I shall not release; sooner will old age come upon her  
 in my household in Argos, far away from her fatherland,  
 going to and fro at the loom and sharing my bed.  
 But go, do not provoke me, so you may safely return.'  
 So he spoke; the old man was frightened and obeyed his command,  
 and went in silence to the shore of the loud-sounding sea.  
 Then withdrawing, the old man prayed at length  
 to the lord Apollo, whom lovely-haired Leto bore:  
 'Hear me, silver-bowed, you who protect Chryse  
 and divine Cilla and rule over Tenedos with strength,  
 Smintheus, if ever I roofed for you a pleasing temple  
 or if indeed ever I burnt for you fat thigh-bones  
 of oxen or goats, accomplish this desire for me:  
 may the Danaans pay for my tears by your arrows.'

(*Iliad* 1. 17-42)

That, as they say, is poetry. Socrates imitating an imitation Homer narrating the episode of Chryses is not so poetic; he indeed begins by warning Adeimantus of this fact: 'I'll speak without metre, *ou gar eimi poiētikos*—for I'm not poetic'; and he proceeds to give this version of the Homeric episode:

When the priest came, he prayed that the gods should grant them the capture of Troy and their safety, but that they should release his daughter, accepting the ransom and honouring the god. When he had said this, the others were reverent and agreed; but Agamemnon was angry, and commanded him to leave right then and not to return again, lest the staff and the fillets of the god not protect him. He said that before his daughter would be released, she would grow old with him in Argos. He ordered him to leave and not to provoke him if he wished safely to return home. Hearing this, the old man was frightened and went away in silence, and having withdrawn from the camp, he prayed at length to Apollo, invoking him by his titles, and reminding him of and demanding return for any gifts, whether in the building of temples or in the burning of sacrifices, that had been pleasing; in return for which he prayed that the Achaeans should pay for his tears with the god's arrows. (*Rep.* 3, 393D 8ff.)

Well, this is indeed not poetic. But in one sense it is quite so; for in this complex chiasmic structure in which imitation is narrated and narration imitated, Socrates *imitating* Homer *narrating* is every bit as much a poet as is Homer imitating Chryses pleading.

Surely, however, he is not as interesting a poet; indeed, a naïve but suspicious reader of the *Republic* might suspect Plato of giving a tendentious representation, designed to impress upon us the preferability of the mimetic to the narrative mode. The preference that is in fact expressed by Socrates and Adeimantus, however, is quite different. They applaud the poet who uses narration most of the time and imitates only when he comes to the speech or *praxis* of a good man. The diction of a moderate poet, a *metrios anēr*, they say, 'will participate in both *mimēsis* and the other kind of narrative, but in a great deal of discourse, there will be only a small bit of *mimēsis*' (*Rep.* 3, 396E 6ff.).

Socrates then urges Adeimantus, in an argument almost dizzying in its reversals, to rise above even such moderation and to disallow even those who mix styles, since such poets violate the principle of one person, one function. They will allow into the city only those poets who, in their style, imitate (!) the pure non-imitative poet.

We might say this another way: Socrates and Adeimantus agree to allow into their republic only poets who do not imitate Plato in his mimetic silence. This fact might lead us to ask which genre of style Plato's dialogues themselves should be thought to exemplify.

But first, here are two interim conclusions. (1) In the early discussions of the *Republic* the stricture against poetry is not against poetry *in general*, but only against a particular form or genre of poetry, that genre which accomplishes its discursive presentation through imitation, where imitation means the poet's creation of a fictional voice. (2) Imitation in turn is not, in its first appearance in the *Republic*, a feature of art in relation to what is represented in art, and specifically not a feature of discourse in its relation to what is represented in discourse; it is not, in other words, part of a theory about the way art in general or literary language in particular mirrors the world by representation. It is rather a feature of literary discourse in terms of the relation between poet and fictional voice, between dramatist and dramatic character, between author and persona.

## 4. Literature as imitation

The claim that Socrates' strictures against mimetic poetry are strictures merely against a particular *form* of poetry depends upon seeing the distinction we have been discussing as a technical distinction within poetic discourse. But we may think of the distinction between imitation and narration as richer or at least broader than is immediately apparent from what we have seen in the *Republic*. In the translocutional act of literary ventriloquy that Socrates has called *mimēsis* we may see figured an essential feature of poetic discourse or of literary or fictional discourse *in general*, a feature that may be thought to distinguish literary discourse from ordinary locutionary action.

In a literary work, an author creates one or several fictional personae who perform illocutionary acts within the fictional world of the work. The author performs no such illocutionary acts in her proper person, but quite different creative acts involved in making the linguistic artefact which is the work. Within the work, it is only the personae, the characters of the work, the voices created by the author, who perform such acts and speak within the work. From the point of view of the reader or author *outside* the literary work, these illocutionary acts must be understood as mimetic or imitative.

Such a description of literary discourse as mimetic discourse may seem particularly appropriate as a description of *drama*, in which we witness full-bodied impersonation. In the heart of his discussion with Socrates concerning *mimēsis*, Adeimantus suddenly expresses just this view: 'I have a hunch, he said, that what you're asking is whether or not we should allow tragedy and comedy into the city.' And Socrates, in one of his characteristically disingenuous but truthful throw-away lines, responds: 'Maybe, and maybe a little more than that, for I myself don't really know; we'll just have to go where the winds of the argument carry us' (*Rep.* 3, 394D 5 ff.).<sup>2</sup>

In making this suggestion, which Socrates does and does not accept, Adeimantus is speaking as though the feature we have been discussing were specifically a feature of the dramatic. So indeed it was often taken in antiquity; Proclus thus *glosses* dramatic as mimetic, referring to the *Republic's* first category of lexis as *tomen dramatikon kai*

<sup>2</sup> Much of the tacking I do in this paper is meant to try to catch those errant winds.

*mimētikon*, 'the dramatic or mimetic' (*In Platonis Rem Publicam commentarii*, ed. W. Kroll [Leipzig, 1899], 14. 20).

One can readily understand what it is about the dramatic that recommends it as a paradigmatic form of the mimetic; but a theory of literature as *mimēsis* cannot selectively apply only to certain types of literature, to drama, for example, and not to lyric poetry. For such a theory offers a view of literature in general, a view deriving from the status of literary discourse itself.

Distinguishing different literary genres as mimetic and non-mimetic confuses facts about specific artistic styles and genres with facts about art in general. Suppose I claimed that although there is a difference between the wheel on my bicycle and a painting of a bicycle-wheel, there is no difference between my wheel and Duchamps's famous bicycle-wheel in the Armory Exhibit. I would be wrong; there is a difference, and it is the same difference. It is not one that can be learnt simply by looking at Duchamps's wheel, for indeed there is nothing different about the wheel; but it has become mimetic, as any object may, by the act of an artist framing it, putting it in a museum, and (thereby) announcing it to be mimetic. This has to do with the ontology of art objects and not with the nature of this or that artistic genre: painting or sculpture or the minimally sculpted sculpture of art trouvé. In the same way, a theory of literature as *mimēsis* has to do with the nature of literary discourse itself and therefore of literature in general, not with any particular genre of literature.

In some cases the mimetic nature of non-dramatic literature will itself be clear. The poems of Browning, for example, obviously provide cases in which an author has created a fictional voice, distanced ironically from the author and from the 'meaning' of the poem itself. One might be curious about Browning's choice of persona, but only the most perverse of readings could confuse the Duke who speaks in 'My Last Duchess' with Browning, or the Duke's values with those of the poem. But although the *distance* between author and persona may be particularly striking in Browning, the ontological *distinction* cannot be unique to his case, but must be equally true for any instance of poetic discourse.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Examples such as this show that the dialogue form is not a necessary condition of the literary status of a text I am here invoking, so that monologues such as the *Republic* or book 5 of the *Laws* are indeed mimetic. It will then become important for us to think about the differences between mimetic *dialogue* and mimetic *monologue*; but both will be mimetic.

So, for instance, the relation between the historical poet Wordsworth and the poetic voice which speaks in his poems: these are not the same person, even though their lives are strikingly similar. Wordsworth the poet lived in a historical place and time continuous with ours, while *The Poet* of a Wordsworth poem—the poetic I which speaks in that poem—lives in a place and time which are part of a fictional world, the fictional world invoked by the very poem Wordsworth has created, and thus a world in a sense created by words. (This is why poets are godlike, and why their activity smells so of hubris.) What is created in these poems, and equally in the poems of Robert Lowell or of Anne Sexton or of any one of a number of poets who might seem to us on first thought to be speaking directly in their poems, is a fictional persona, a persona who greatly resembles the person of the author, but who is ontologically distinct.<sup>4</sup>

Since the fact that every poetic voice is part of a mimetic world follows from the nature of literary discourse rather than from a special feature of certain poetry, it must follow that every *narrative* voice is also part of a fictional world created by its author. The narrative voice in *Tom Jones*, for example, is a voice authored by Fielding, but it is not the voice of Fielding; it is a voice which lives within the fictional world created by the novel and ultimately by the novel's author.<sup>5</sup>

It is clear that I have come far from viewing Socrates' distinction as a relatively straightforward and uncontroversial distinction of style, and thus far from a simple interpretation of Socrates' meaning; for we have come to see *mimēsis* as not simply one among several narrative styles, but as a general principle of literary discourse. Does this mean that we might be led to think of the Socratic deprecation of *mimēsis* as constituting after all a deprecation of literature in general?

<sup>4</sup> For a reminder of how difficult this point may seem to modern readers of classical texts, see K. J. Dover, 'The Poetry of Archilochus', in *Archiloque* (Entretiens de la Fondation Hardt, 10; Vandœuvres-Genève, 1963). For that difficulty in the ancient world, recall the (mimetic) threat of Catullus 16—'paedicabo vos et irrumabo'—to those who think that a poet lives the life of his literary personae.

<sup>5</sup> The complexity of this issue can be seen if we think back upon Socrates' choice of the Homeric poem as a test case. The Homeric poems are examples of narrative in Socrates' sense (or more properly examples of his mixed style) only if we think of them primarily as a description of the Trojan war and the adventures of Odysseus. But suppose we read the two poems together and backwards, as it were, starting with Odysseus' telling in Phaeacia, a telling that is itself a *mimēsis* of the self-identification demanded of the *xenos*. We might then come to regard the central event of the poems as the recounting itself, and the bard rather than the warrior as their central figure; in that case, the Homeric poems may be thought of as mimetic.

## 5. The dialogues as imitation

Before thinking about that question, I want to return to an earlier question: considering the distinction that Plato has Socrates elaborate in book 3 of the *Republic* simply as a distinction of style, how does it apply to Plato's writing itself? In which category of discourse do the Platonic dialogues fall?

Our first inclination may be to note a parallel distinction, commonly marked in antiquity, between *narrated dialogues*, such as the *Lysis* or *Charmides* or *Republic*, in which the central conversation is reported in indirect discourse, and *dramatic dialogues*, such as the *Euthyphro* or *Gorgias* or *Sophist*, whose speeches are in direct discourse with no narrative frame. We may then think of the dramatic dialogues as mimetic, and of the narrated or reported dialogues as primarily narrative, or as belonging to the mixed genre of *Republic* 3. This is how Proclus, for example, asking exactly this question, read the *Republic*, as a mixed genre (*In Rem Publicam* 14. 28).

But when we think about the nature of the reporting voice in the reported dialogues, it seems difficult to think of these dialogues as narrative in the sense we have been contrasting to mimetic. For it is not *Plato* who narrates these dialogues, since here as elsewhere he remains silent. Precisely because he is the *author* of the narrative voice, he cannot *be* that voice. So the reported dialogues cannot be narrative in Socrates' sense; in each of them the narrative voice is itself mimetic. The narrator is either, as in the *Republic* or *Charmides*, a strong and clearly dramatized character in the dialogue's innermost drama (most often Socrates) or, as in the *Phaedo* or the particularly complex *Symposium*, a character in a frame drama that introduces him in a dramatic context, or, as in the *Euthydemus* or *Protagoras*, both.

We may think of the narrated dialogues as in this respect dramatic simply by thinking of them as dialogues with an invisible narrator who has just stepped back and mimetically hidden himself. We indeed have essentially such a dialogue in the *Theaetetus*. This extraordinary work begins with a (semi-)frame drama which makes clear that the inner dialogue is being narrated by one of the frame characters, by Euclides or by his slave. (Which one actually does the narration depends on the currently modish question of whether we privilege as the central act of narration writing, since Euclides wrote the account of the dialogue, or speaking, since the slave is pictured as reading it



out loud.) But the form of the dialogue is purely mimetic; the characters of the frame story, who would naturally be expected to practise the *diēgēsis* of the reported dialogues, instead abandon the diegetic task, abandon indirect discourse, and leave the dialogue to *mimēsis* neat. Euclides announces this fact:

This is the book, Terpsion; I have written the conversation in the way you see here, with Socrates not narrating it (*diēgoumenon*) as he narrated it to me, but carrying on a dialogue (*dialegomenon*) with the persons he told me he spoke with. He said that these were Theodorus the geometer and Theaetetus. I wanted to avoid the troublesome effect on the writing of pieces of narrative interrupting the speeches, such as 'and I said', 'and I remarked', whenever Socrates was speaking of himself, or 'he conceded', 'he didn't agree', whenever he was speaking of the person responding. For these reasons I left out such things and wrote it as an actual dialogue between him and the others. (*Theaet.* 143B 5 ff.)

Here we see not simply the evanescence of the distinction between narration and *mimēsis*, but a privileging, if anything, of what has been identified as the mimetic style. This privileging merely underscores the striking fact that despite Socrates' profession of the preferability of narration to *mimēsis* there is no authorial, no non-mimetic narrative voice in the dialogue. I have just argued that the apparent existence of such a voice would make no important difference, since even a voice identified as authorial remains a voice within the fictional space of the work, and is therefore mimetic. But the evident mimetic status of the dialogues' narrators makes this point even more strongly, and the *Theaetetus*' privileging of the mimetic underscores this fact; the dialogues are themselves instances of *mimēsis*.

It is not clear what would count as conclusive evidence that Plato intended the dialogues to be read this way. We do have his *ipse dixit* in the *Second Letter* that the dialogues we have are not the writings of Plato, but of a Socrates 'refurbished and made young' (*Second Letter* 314C 4). This surely makes it seem that Plato has crafted the dialogues with authorial silence and the resultant *mimēsis* very much in mind; indeed an anonymous scholiast comments on these very words: 'From this it is clear why in his own books Plato never participates in the dialogue (*mēden dialegetai*).'<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Scholium on *Second Letter* 314C, in *Appendix Platonica*, ed. K. F. Hermann (Leipzig, 1920), 390.

But we may find this evidence unsatisfactory. Apart from the fact that some fastidious scholars have questioned the authenticity of the *Second Letter*, there is a deeper and more perplexing problem. Once we have come to include narrative voice itself among the voices that Plato creates and from which he is distanced by the gap which we sometimes call irony, but which I have here suggested should be seen as a principle of literature itself, how can we be assured that the voice of the *Second Letter* or of the *Seventh* is not itself merely another such persona, which has to be interpreted in relation to what Plato means?

This is an unsettling realization, and it is because it is unsettling, I think, that we feel the urge to anchor meaning not merely in an unambiguous meant but in the unambiguous intentions of a meaner, an urge to which many thinkers foolishly surrender. But we need not be unsettled. We know how to read the meaning of Greek tragedies, that is, how to interpret them, without off-stage prompting from their authors: we attend carefully to what is said and to what happens in these tragedies. And so here we can attend carefully to what is said and to what happens in the dialogues.

In one sense little will have changed; we shall have to pay the same careful attention to arguments and to their logic, and to do this it will be necessary for us to analyse the specific arguments of the dialogues, just as it is necessary for a Shakespearian scholar to analyse the speeches of Hotspur and Hal. This is an important fact to stress in the context of discussions concerning Platonic hermeneutics. Platonic dialogues are philosophical dialogues in at least two senses. (1) They are philosophical dramas in the sense that the action that takes place, that is represented mimetically, is philosophical argument. To understand them, therefore, even on the most radically belletristic reading or on a reading which sees the psychagogy and enlightenment of the interlocutor as the central event, we need to undertake philosophical analysis, just as we need analysis of any mythos, any plot, in terms of the issues and discourse central to that mythos. (2) More importantly, the dialogues are works of philosophy in an even stronger sense than that in which *Henry IV* may be said to be a work of English history. So that if we need to analyse the arguments of Hal and Hotspur to see unfolded for us the drama of ambition, pride, youth, the tragedy of political involvement, then *a fortiori* we need to analyse the speeches of the *Euthyphro* not merely to see the drama of the *alazōn* unmasked, nor even the drama of expertise and understanding, but to grasp the nature of the holy and to understand the complex and substantive

philosophical points which Plato presents to us the readers here as in all the dialogues. We need, in other words, to understand both the philosophy at the mimetic level which takes place within the dialogue, and the philosophy at the discursive level which is effected by the dialogue.

So analysis will have to continue unabated. But there will be some implications. We shall not be able to read *directly* out of the dialogues anything that counts *eo ipso* as a theory of Plato; we shall be unable simply to extract a passage and imagine that straight away we have Plato's theory of this or of that. For we shall be forced to recognize that there is always some ironizing distance, though it may be set at zero, between the views of Plato and those of Socrates or of the Stranger. Nor shall we be able simply to quote a fallacy and say: here is a mistake of Plato. It may be that Plato has nodded, but it may also be that he has given us the fallacy to serve some important philosophical point in the context of the dialogue.

These phenomena might seem more pronounced in the early than in the late dialogues, where positive doctrine and direct discourse seem finally to flourish. I doubt that; it seems to me important to read the doctrines of Socrates or of the Eleatic Stranger in the later dialogues with the same hermeneutical attention to ironic distancing and mimetic displacement as we bring to the earlier dialogues.

But it is clear in the early dialogues. Consider simply this: if we think of the search that characterizes those dialogues as the attempt to find and articulate a particular definition, it becomes problematic why Plato, if he knows the definition, does not simply step out from behind the characters and give the proper account, if not to the characters themselves, at least to *us*. This is to repeat the question of Platonic silence; the answer, we now see, is that Plato does give the proper account, but gives it through the complex mediation of mimetic discourse.

## 6. Philosophy as imitation

These considerations may seem unsettling, however, for a deeper reason. For they call into question not simply the distinction between *mimēsis* and narration, but the distinction by which we marked out literature from other discourse in the first place, the distinction that allowed us to entertain the idea that *some* philosophical writings, *unlike*

*others*, might be literary. In thinking of the voice of Plato in his letters as a mimetic voice, we have allowed *mimēsis* to embrace discourse in general, and have thus erased the distinction which in the first place allowed *mimēsis* to emerge.

It may be the fate of synecdoche to turn upon itself in this way; when a part is made to figure the whole, the distinction by which the figuring part is marked out fades and disappears. And in philosophy, which so often traffics in global synecdoche, letting this or that part of reality embrace, by the trope of reductive explanation, the whole of reality, we should be inured to this possibility, and not frightened by it. For the original distinctions remain: when Berkeley urges us to realize that all is mind and its ideas, he cannot be refuted by the kicking of a stone. For he is not calling on us to question the existence of stones or their solidity; he is calling on us to rethink (albeit radically) the nature of stones and solidity.

So we may have to rethink our theory of philosophy, not just of literature, or rather we may have to rethink our theory of literature, but realize that philosophical writing is a form of literature. The question 'How does Socrates' distinction apply to Plato's writing itself?' may thus be part of a larger question about what happens when we think of philosophy as a genre of literature.

Such a question may sound more radical than it really is; it is not meant to deny the distinction between philosophy and what we traditionally think of as literature, but merely to point to what such forms of discourse have in common. To think of philosophy as in this sense literature is the temporary erasure of a distinction which must be reasserted once the force of the erasure has been realized. Practically it may lead us to an interest in what happens when we apply concepts of literary interpretation to philosophical texts. Since questions of literary interpretation are questions of hermeneutics relative to a text, the questions we ask about literary texts are (many of them) simply about literary texts as *texts*, and therefore can be asked about philosophical texts.

What we may have to rethink, in other words, is a theory of the style and rhetoric of philosophical discourse. 'Style' here means the general features of philosophical discourse considered as such (considered as *discours*, as some of our friends might say, rather than as *histoire*). Suppose, for example, that philosophy were the story of the gradual development of spirit; a theory of philosophical style and rhetoric would be interested not in the events which the story relates, but in the

features of the telling, not in the narrative which is narrated, but in the narration which narrates the narrative.

That subquestion of philosophy, the philosophy of philosophical discourse, rests on the recognition that we are perforce required to read philosophers or to listen to them, that is to say, to read their texts or to listen to their words.<sup>7</sup> It is of course the philosophers themselves whom we hear in their words, as it is the world itself which we experience in its appearance. But to recognize that necessary if transparent mediation of discourse is to recognize the sense in which we necessarily stand at one mimetic remove from the silent philosophical figures who author this discourse.

### 7. The double message of the dialogues

Here is what I think has emerged: (1) *Contra* Plato's apparent intentions, the distinction that Socrates introduces in book 3 of the *Republic* may be difficult to sustain. (2) The notion that Plato means to privilege what is marked out as the narrative at the expense of the mimetic is equally difficult to sustain. Thinking about Platonic writing itself in terms of that distinction should lead us, I have suggested, to the realization that all the dialogues are mimetic or imitative in the sense we have spelt out. This realization might be the source of great *aporia* in our reading of the *Republic*; for we are apparently invited to envisage a perfect polity from which is to be excluded a body of literature which includes the dialogues themselves.

But this is only, I am suggesting, what the dialogues say in their narrative interior; at the same time they subvert this valorization of the non-mimetic and undercut the represented narrative claim which their act of *mimēsis* gives us. We should have been sensitive to this subversion when first we heard the superiority of Homer (or for that matter of most of Plato) to the Platonic imitation of Homer. What the dialogues narratively present is a denial of *mimēsis*, but what they constitute at the mimetic level is a valorization of *mimēsis*, that *mimēsis* which they themselves embody.

<sup>7</sup> In the words of that great American philosopher Will Rogers, 'I never read a man that didn't write'.

## 8. Two modes of imitation

Let us return now to the second of the conclusions that arose from our much earlier discussion. In the first appearance of *mimēsis* in the *Republic*, we noted, it is not art that imitates nature, but an author that imitates his characters. It is easy to confuse these modes of *mimēsis*. Consider Seneca's often quoted claim that 'omnis ars naturae imitatio est'—'all art is imitation of nature' (*Ep.* 65. 3). This claim is not what it might seem to be; it is not the claim that art is a representation or model of nature, or that the artist is engaged in fashioning a copy of nature. It is rather, as its context makes clear, the confluence of two quite different classical *topoi*: that of the artist as imitating a greater artistic master, and that of nature as master artist, the very master artist which the human artist imitates. It is a direct descendant of Aristotle's claim that art imitates nature—*hē tekhnēi mimeitai tēn phusin*—a claim that Aristotle makes when noting the ways in which cooking helps digestion by pretending, as it were, to be nature (*Meteor.* 4, 381<sup>b</sup>6).

So in book 3 of the *Republic*, imitation is not about discourse in relation to what is represented in discourse, but about the relation between the creator of a piece of literary discourse, and the created voice or voices within the discourse. But if so, the *Republic* would appear to be concerned with two different sorts of imitation. For while the discussion in book 3 has to do with poets imitating characters rather than with art imitating nature, the discussion in book 10 seems concerned with a notion of *mimēsis* as the artist's imitation of reality by a structure of discourse or by an object of art. Imitation there seems to take place by virtue of the ability of the artist to create an object, a piece of discourse, for example, or some other artefact, which represents and images reality. It is this view of art as imitation which appears to relegate art and poetic discourse in general to a third remove from reality.

But in fact the sense of *mimēsis* in book 10 is not radically different from that in book 3. For although in one sense the painter, as practitioner of the mimetic art, is said to be imitating the very thing which the craftsman makes, in another sense he is said to imitate, not, for example, the bed, but the bedmaker, who in turn imitates God in his making of a bed.

Observe how in book 10 Socrates leads the discussion from one

sense to another. He first asks Glaucon whether a painter is a craftsman or maker of a bed. 'No way', answers Glaucon. 'But then,' asks Socrates, 'what would you say he is: he's the *what* of the bed? It seems to me, [Glaucon] said, that it would make most sense to address him as the imitator of that of which those are the craftsmen' (*Rep.* 10, 597D 11 ff.). But very soon Socrates subtly changes the object of imitation from the bed to the bedmaker. He accomplishes the move in steps. First we read:

The mimetic art is therefore far from the truth and, it would seem, it is because of this fact that it is able to produce all things: it grasps of each thing a small part, the image. So the painter, we say, will paint for us a shoemaker, a carpenter, and the other craftsmen, although he doesn't understand the crafts of any one of them. (*Rep.* 10, 598B 8ff.)

Here the painter paints not shoes and beds, but shoemakers and bedmakers; in a moment Socrates describes his activity more generally: 'the painter will make what seems to be a shoemaker, though he himself doesn't understand shoemaking, for those who also don't understand shoemaking, but who observe only colours and shapes' (*Rep.* 10, 600E 7ff.). The description here is ambiguous; the painter may be painting a shoemaker, or he may be painting shoes and in that way imitating a shoemaker for those who take his painted shoes as shoes. The latter interpretation becomes more inviting as we read on:

In this way, then, I suppose we shall say that the poet colours in the colours of each of the crafts with words and phrases, though he himself doesn't understand but imitates, so that he seems to those others who observe only speeches, when he speaks on shoemaking or on strategy or on any of the other arts with metre and rhythm and harmony, to speak well. (*Rep.* 10, 601A 4 ff.)

It is clear here that the mimetic poet imitates a speaker. His *mimēsis* is thus of a piece with the *mimēsis* of book 3, and it is thus no surprise that when Socrates returns to the issue of which poets will be allowed in the city, the old sense of *mimēsis* resurfaces to join the new, and we hear of 'Homer or any other of the tragic poets imitating one of the heroes in mourning' (*Rep.* 10, 605C 11–12). Here it is the poet who imitates his characters in his discourse, and not the characters or the discourse which imitates people in the world.

The poet is not primarily a creator of things that imitate; it is the poet himself who is an imitator in that he makes imitation things. It is

not, in other words, that the poet is an imitator because he creates something (a piece of discourse) that imitates reality; he is an imitator because he imitates a speaker speaking the truth about reality, though it is the reality of that fictional speaker's fictional world, his reality. It is the relation between the poet and the speaker that is the imitative relation; the poet creates an imitation speaker who makes real speeches in the imitative world.<sup>8</sup> The fact that poetry is imitation does not mean that poetry imitates, but that it, like all literary discourse, is the object of an act of imitating. Poetry, that is to say, is imitation, not imitative.

But even if we suppose that the two accounts of imitation in book 3 and book 10 are different, there is still an interesting and revealing structural similarity between them. For the opposition between author and character in book 3 is mirrored in the opposition between original and imitation in book 10, and both of these oppositions are figured in the general set of corresponding oppositions that structure so much of the argument and imagery of the *Republic*: original and image, reality and appearance, Forms and entities, being and nature, nature and art. Author then may be thought to stand in relation to character as original to imitation, that is to say, as Form to nature. This structural analogy between author and Form reveals (almost in Kantian fashion) Subject and Being as on a par with one another. For it recognizes that although both are in one sense transcendental with respect to their various manifestations, they are in another sense ideal constructs out of these manifestations, constructs out of what is represented in the mimetic play of discourse and nature alike.

The figural identity of authorial subject and original Form signals the complexity of Plato's discussion. We have seen the sense in which *mimēsis* is in fact exemplified throughout the dialogues, and is thus validated and endorsed by this very act of authorization on Plato's part. We may now see this fact as a piece of Plato's central ontological tenet: the reality of appearance is nothing less than that of Being in so far as Being makes its appearance. This is a fact which we consistently overlook when we misread the Platonic relation between Form and representation by reading Plato from the point of view of the sophist or of the Friend of the Forms. Plato, after all, was no Platonist.

These facts may help us to understand Plato's treatment of *mimēsis*. The issue of representation for Plato is not one of how the word

<sup>8</sup> 'Imaginary gardens with real toad in them', as Marianne Moore puts it in 'Poetry', not imaginary toads in gardens that are real.



embodies nature, but of how word and nature alike embody Being. The critique of *mimēsis* in book 10 is thus a critique of the very view of *mimēsis* which we are tempted to attribute to Plato, a view in which word is twice removed from Being and stands in need of mediation *through* nature, rather than itself a mode of mediation and representation on a par with nature.

### 9. Platonic silence and Platonic imitation

I have argued in this paper that there is a double relationship between silence and imitation; silence is both the condition of and the privation of imitation, and imitation a means both of preserving and of undoing the silence of the imitator. An imitator, in short, both is and is not silent. The relationship between imitator and imitated, I have further suggested, is itself a mirroring of the ontological relationship between Form and particular, or more generally of the archetypal relationship between original and image. Plato, as author, thus imitates the Forms in their imitative action.

There are other structures of imitation as well throughout the dialogues. There is, for example, the imitation by the sophist of the various mimetic forms which he adopts in his effort to hide in the silence of non-being; but more importantly, there is the imitation of the sophist by the philosopher, and of the philosopher by the sophist (see e.g. *Soph.* 216C 3ff., 268B 10ff.). The inescapability of these structures of imitation should remind us that the dream of a non-mimetic language, of a pure narrative transparency of discourse, is but one of the many dreams which Plato allows us to glimpse and to recognize as dreams. It is akin to the political dream of the *Republic* itself, in whose story it is embedded, and to the other dream of that fantastic dialogue: the dream that there might be a pure line of transmission from Form to particular, or from being to *logos*. It is also akin to the literal Platonic dreams: the dream in the *Charmides* of a community ruled by the transparent and empty virtue of *sōphrosynē*, or the fantastic Tractarian dream at the end of the *Theaetetus* of a world of perspicuous simples joined by pellucid syntactic *logoi*.

These dreams are all dreams; they may in a deep sense be true, but they stand in need of an *oneirokritēs* if they are not to mislead us, in need of the critical powers of our interpretative acts to reveal their true meaning. For the philosophical task in Plato's view is not to create or

to discover an impossible transparent narrative style, a mode of discourse non-theatrical and non-mimetic, nor to discover thereby some pure and unrefracted world of Being. The task is rather to discover how, fixed firmly in the necessity of our displaced mimetic voice, we may learn to read the silent world of Being as it speaks mimetically in the flux of appearance.

*Haverford College*

# PLATO AND THE EROTICS OF NARRATIVITY

DAVID M. HALPERIN

## I

ONE of the most curious and seldom remarked facts about Plato's Dialogues is that many of them are not, in fact, dialogues. By this I do not mean that Plato's Dialogues are not 'real' dialogues or 'true' conversations (measured against some normative standard of conversational reciprocity): I am not about to lodge against Plato the routine liberal complaint that he fails to portray genuinely mutual, free-wheeling discussions—choosing to represent, instead, a series of highly asymmetrical exchanges between Socrates (or some other Platonic mouthpiece), who does most of the talking, and various other, more or less co-operative, interlocutors, who (with the refreshing exceptions of Callicles in the *Gorgias* and Thrasymachus in the first book of the *Republic*) are largely 'yes-men'.<sup>1</sup> What I mean, rather, is

© David M. Halperin 1992

An earlier version of this paper was presented at a meeting of the Cambridge Humanities Seminar, in Cambridge, Mass., in the spring of 1982. I wish to thank Alvin C. Kibel for inviting me to participate in the Seminar, as well as the members of the Seminar, for their interest and advice. The revision of this paper has been generously supported by a sabbatical leave from MIT and by a fellowship, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, from the Stanford Humanities Center. I am particularly grateful to Madeleine H. Kahn and to John Kleiner, my colleagues at the Center, for discussing with me some of the issues addressed in this paper and for the inspiration of their intellectual example. I also wish to thank James Klagge and Nicholas D. Smith for inviting me to speak at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and for staging such a splendid conference. I owe a great deal to Helen Bacon for her timely encouragement and sound advice, as well as to Harry Berger, jun., David Konstan, Mark L. McPherran, Nicholas D. Smith, and Emery J. Snyder for detailed and incisive critiques of the revised version. Finally, I wish to thank Martha Nussbaum, who presented a formal commentary on this paper at Blacksburg, for her friendly, helpful, and provocative response. I hope no one will feel disgraced by the result.

<sup>1</sup> For the application of this term see Gregory Vlastos, 'The Socratic Elenchus', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 1 (1983), 27–58, esp. 57.

that a number of Plato's so-called Dialogues are not dialogues at all in the formal sense: their characteristic mode of representation is not dramatic but narrative.<sup>2</sup>

The formal, theoretical or conceptual, distinction between dramatic and narrative literature is not one that is likely to have been lost on Plato. For that very distinction originated with Plato himself.<sup>3</sup> In the third book of the *Republic* Socrates divides literature into three kinds, according to whether it employs as its representational medium 'simple narration' (*haplḗ diēgēsis*),<sup>4</sup> 'imitation' (*mimēsis*), or a combination of the two (392D–394C). 'Simple narration' is defined as that mode of representation in which the author does not conceal himself (393C 11) but speaks to the audience in his own person (394C 2–3) 'without imitation' (393D 1, 394A 7–B 1)—that is, without citing the direct speech of his characters and thereby impersonating or 'imitating' them. 'Simple narration' can be found mostly in dithyrambs, Socrates tells us (394C 3); the late antique grammarian Servius added didactic poetry, as exemplified by the first three books of Virgil's *Georgics*, to the same category.<sup>5</sup> 'Imitation' is originally introduced by Socrates in the *Republic* as an alternative to 'simple narration': it is defined as narration that is effected through imitation, and it refers, in the first instance, to those passages in epic poetry in which the poet's characters speak *in propria persona* (392D 5–6, 393C 8–9); it is later defined more starkly, however, as 'the opposite' of simple narration (394B 3), and it comes to refer to the exchange of direct speeches between characters, such as occurs in tragedy and comedy (394B 6–C 2). A third representational mode, combining simple narration and imitation, is exemplified by epic poetry, and by many other (unmentioned) forms of literature (394C 4–5).

<sup>2</sup> Noted in antiquity, quite nonchalantly, by a character in Plutarch's *Table-Talk* 7. 8. 1 (= *Mor.* 711B–C): commentary by Michael W. Haslam, 'Plato, Sophron, and the Dramatic Dialogue', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 19 (1972), 17–38 [Haslam], esp. 21.

<sup>3</sup> For further details about the history of this distinction, see Haslam, 20–1.

<sup>4</sup> This phrase is rendered as 'simple rehearsal' by Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), 21.

<sup>5</sup> See Servius' introduction to his commentary on Virgil's *Third Eclogue*, and cf. the third book of the *Ars grammatica* by Servius' near contemporary, Diomedes. On the revival of the Platonic categories by the Latin grammarians of late antiquity, see Peter Steinmetz, 'Gattungen und Epochen der griechischen Literatur in der Sicht Quintilians', *Hermes*, 92 (1964), 454–66, esp. 459–63; generally, Carlo Gallavotti, 'Sulle classificazioni dei generi letterari nell' estetica antica', *Athenaeum*, NS 6 (1928), 356–66; E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Bollingen Series, 36; New York, 1953), 436–43.

Several of Plato's Dialogues belong, interestingly enough, to this third mode, which later grammarians often called by the name of 'mixed' narrative. It is a literary form that does not achieve anything like the purity, the freedom from 'imitation', that characterizes the sort of 'simple narration' that Socrates devises in the *Republic* by converting the exchange of speeches between Agamemnon and Chryses in the *Iliad*'s opening episode into indirect discourse (393C 11–394B 1): on the contrary, it requires of the (vocalizing) reader very nearly the same histrionic antics as does drama. Moreover, Plato's 'mixed' narratives are not narrated, after the manner of Homer or the historians, in anything approaching what we now call a third-person omniscient mode. Instead, Socratic conversations are *reported* in the first person without any preliminary introduction (as if they were addressed directly to the reader or to some silent interlocutor who never comes forward to claim the addressee's role) by a fictional, if historically grounded, character. That character usually turns out to be Socrates himself, as in the case of the *Charmides* (which begins, 'We got back on the previous evening from Potidaea . . .'), the *Lysis* ('I was making my way from the Academy straight to the Lyceum . . .'), and, most notoriously, the *Republic* ('I went down yesterday to the Piraeus with Glaucon . . .'); the bizarre exception is the *Parmenides*, which turns out to be narrated by Cephalus ('When we reached Athens from our home in Clazomenae . . .'), who recounts a Socratic dialogue as it was reported to him by Antiphon the elder, Plato's half-brother, who had himself heard it from Pythodorus.<sup>6</sup>

Even more intriguing are those Dialogues which seem at first to have the form of drama—to consist of a conversation directly represented without the mediation of a narrative frame—but which quickly abandon that dramatic mode in favour of a 'mixed' narrative by making one of the initial interlocutors into the uninterrupted narrator<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Plato, *Symposium*, ed. Kenneth Dover (Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics; Cambridge, 1980) [Dover], 8–9, comparing the compositional form of the *Parmenides* to that of the *Symposium*: 'Plato's reasons for adopting this technique in a minority of his works are not known; in some others, Socrates himself is the narrator, and the majority are cast in purely dramatic form throughout. Conceivably Plato wished to give authority to his portrayal of Socrates by implicitly inviting us to check it against an independent tradition. On the other hand, he may have intended an oblique suggestion that his portrayal should be judged—like myths or moralising anecdotes—more on its intrinsic merits and the lessons to be learned from it than on its truth to fact.'

<sup>7</sup> Only in the *Euthydemus* does the forgotten interlocutor suddenly pop up to interrupt the narrative in the middle and carry on a short conversation with the narrator

of another entire conversation. Some of these Dialogues are narrated by Socrates himself after a few preliminary, and rather desultory, exchanges with a member of his circle (as in the case of the *Protagoras* and the *Euthydemus*), but others consist of a Socratic conversation related by a third party to an entirely different audience in response to some brief, introductory request for a story. This latter type is exemplified by the *Phaedo* and by the *Symposium*.<sup>8</sup> *Phaedo* is prompted by the questions of Echecrates to embark on a lengthy account of Socrates' valedictory conversation with his friends; Apollodorus repeats, for the second time in three days, the story of what was said and done at Agathon's private victory celebration—this time, to a group of nameless acquaintances whose importunities actually *precede* the spirited exchange with which the text of the *Symposium* opens. Moreover, in all of these cases, except for the *Euthydemus*, the dramatic dialogue that introduces the narrative is not resumed at the end of it (although in the *Phaedo* the dramatic situation is at least alluded to in the final words of the Dialogue), thereby leaving the dramatic frame—if that is what it can properly be called—incomplete and asymmetrical. Why does Plato adopt such a peculiar narrative strategy?

## II

I should say right now that I do not propose to answer this question. I intend to pursue it, however, by examining the Dialogue whose narrative structure Plato most fully thematizes: namely, the *Symposium*. That work also possesses—not coincidentally, we may assume—what is probably the most intricate compositional form of any of the Dialogues. The *Symposium* begins with an exchange of remarks, in dramatic (or 'true' dialogue) form, between Apollodorus, a devoted follower of Socrates, and some unnamed acquaintances. Apollodorus

(that Dialogue is also exceptional in that it closes with a resumption of the conversation that had originally opened it).

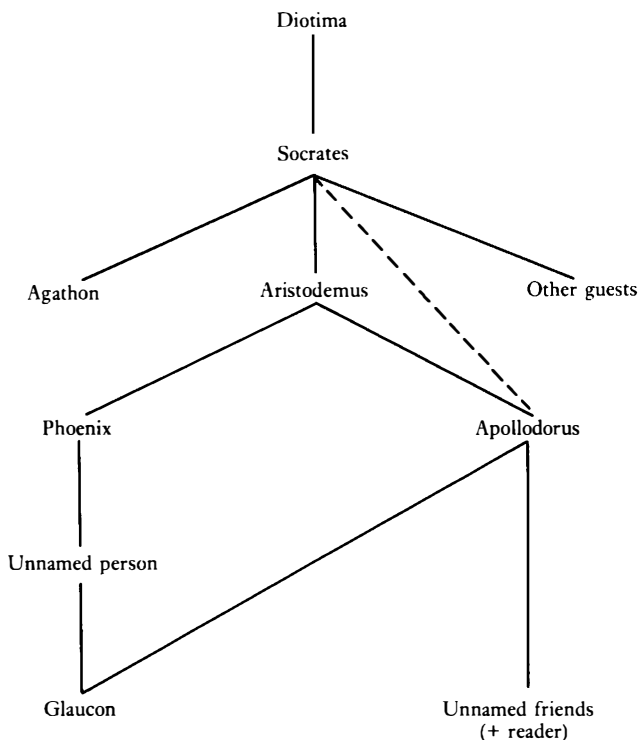
<sup>8</sup> The *Phaedo* and *Symposium* form a Platonic 'diptych', as Charles Kahn remarks ('Drama and Dialectic in Plato's *Gorgias*', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 1 [1983], 75–121, esp. 119); they should be read as a pair. See John A. Brentlinger, 'The Cycle of Becoming in the *Symposium*', in Suzy Q. Groden (trans.), *The Symposium of Plato* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1970), 1–31 [Brentlinger], esp. 2; Bruce Rosenstock, 'Socrates' New Music: The *Symposium* and the *Phaedo*' (unpublished MS), [Rosenstock].

has just been asked, apparently, to tell the story of Agathon's victory-party—a story he had related, he says, to another acquaintance, named Glaucon, two days before—and after some further banter with his friends he accedes to their request. His narrative occupies the remainder of Plato's text, which concludes when Apollodorus comes to what is presumably the end of his story: we never learn what response, if any, his auditors make to it. Apollodorus, however, did not himself attend Agathon's party, which in fact took place many years before the conversation that he is currently engaged in; he can only recapitulate the narrative handed down to him by Aristodemus, an earlier and equally devoted admirer of Socrates, who did attend. The centre-piece of Aristodemus' narrative is a speech about the nature of *erōs* made by Socrates to Agathon and his assembled guests; that speech itself contains a lengthy narrative describing another conversation on the same subject between Socrates and one Diotima, a Mantineian prophetess, and that conversation in turn culminates in yet another speech by Diotima, also about the nature of *erōs*, which is reported by Socrates virtually without concluding comment.

The formal literary structure of the *Symposium*, then, is that of a dialogue which contains within it a series of inset narratives, each of them containing another dialogue and each of them taking the reader further away in time from the dramatic date of the conversation between Apollodorus and his acquaintances. Each framing narrative recedes to disclose another nested inside it, one containing the next like a set of lacquered Chinese boxes. Nor does Plato attempt to make this series of insets transparent to the reader by dissolving the sequence of narrative frames through an illusion of dramatic immediacy, of the reader's direct access to the events narrated. On the contrary: with the chief exception of Diotima's speech, which for a few pages occupies the entire foreground of the narrative, Plato constantly reminds the reader of the many narrators that intervene between the reader and the transmitted story—he emphasizes the *reported* character of the account—by sprinkling throughout Apollodorus' narrative such phrases as 'he said that he said' (*ephē phanai* or, simply, *phanai*), phrases often omitted in translation through a wish to avoid unnecessary awkwardness but so copious in the original as to make the text of the *Symposium* an ideal object lesson in the use of indirect discourse in Attic Greek.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the earliest event depicted, Diotima's

<sup>9</sup> See Roger Hornsby, 'Significant Action in the *Symposium*', *Classical Journal*, 52 (1956–7), 37–40, followed by Helen H. Bacon, 'Socrates Crowned', *Virginia Quarterly*

refutation of Socrates, reaches us by an elaborate, lengthy, and rather devious process of transmission. Indeed, that process of transmission (as it is described in the opening pages of the *Dialogue*) is even more complicated than this preliminary summary has indicated: if one were to represent the descent by oral tradition of Diotima's discourse in the form customarily reserved for conveying the transmission of written texts in a manuscript tradition, the stemma would look something like this.



(Unbroken lines indicate direct descent; the broken line indicates 'contamination'.)

Moreover, the opening of the *Symposium* emphasizes, by means of the very language Apollodorus uses in speaking to his friends, that what is about to follow will be a report, a narrative (*diēgēsis*), not a

*Review*, 35 (1959), 415–30 [Bacon], esp. 418–19: 'the reader is forced by the structure of the language itself to participate in two dialogues at once.' For a detailed and careful summary of Plato's use of the various constructions of reported speech, see Dover, 80–1.



dialogue of the sort that is currently taking place between Apollodorus and the assembled company. Glaucon tells Apollodorus (in the latter's recounting of their conversation) that someone who had heard the story of Agathon's party from Phoenix *narrated* it to him, Glaucon, though ineptly; he then asks Apollodorus to *narrate* it to him in turn; Apollodorus remarks that Glaucon's *narrator* had evidently not *narrated* the story clearly; who *narrated* the story to you?, Glaucon enquires; Socrates' account agreed with what Aristodemus *narrated*, Apollodorus assures us; well, then, *narrate* it to me now, Glaucon urges; if I have to *narrate* it to you as well, Apollodorus tells his unnamed interlocutors, I'll try to *narrate* it to you from the beginning as he *narrated* it to me (172B 3–174A 2). I have, of course, been over-translating for the sake of emphasis: Plato's usage, far from sounding so odd as my rendering would suggest, is (as always) in perfectly good Greek style, which seeks rather than eschews redundancy and employs *diēgēsis* for the recounting of a story. None the less, Plato's insistence is remarkable and significant: if any doubts remain on that score, one need only compare the opening of the *Theaetetus*. There Plato, for reasons of his own, takes a pointedly opposite tack, underscoring his preference for the dramatic over the narrative mode of representation. Euclides has heard from Socrates a *narrative* (142D 1) of the latter's earlier *dialogue* (142C 7, C 8–D 1) with Theaetetus, has taken notes at the time, written it all out later, checked it repeatedly with Socrates, and now possesses a complete written transcript of it; when asked specifically for the *narrative* (142D 5), however, Euclides explains that his account is written in *dialogue* form (143B 7), not in *narrative* form (143B 6–7: each term occurs twice, for the sake of emphasis), because, he says, 'I wanted to avoid in the written account the tiresome effect of bits of *narrative* interrupting the speeches, such as "and I said" or "and I remarked" wherever Socrates was speaking himself, and "he assented" or "he did not agree", where he reported the answer. So I left out everything of that sort, and wrote it as a *dialogue* between the actual speakers' (143B 8–C 5; trans. Cornford, with modifications). The procedure described by Euclides exactly reverses what Plato has done in the case of the *Symposium*. Plato's deliberate avoidance in the *Theaetetus*, then, of both oral transmission (in the work's dramatic register) and of narrative structure (in its formal register) must be programmatic for that Dialogue and is doubtless intended to contrast with the representational strategy chosen by Plato for the *Symposium*.

The elaborate and bizarrely complex compositional form of the *Symposium* can be accounted for in at least two ways that do not refer directly to the philosophical doctrines enunciated in the *Dialogue*. First, Plato's choice of historical setting and his spacing of the various conversations at temporal removes from one another create a retrospective irony: by granting the reader more knowledge about what life has in store for the interlocutors than any one of them possesses at any given moment, Plato imparts to their words a significance of which they themselves are unaware. He thereby puts the reader in a position to judge 'how the mettle of their characters, the value of their aspirations—their loves—have withstood the test of time'.<sup>10</sup> Their lives and loves can now be measured against their words and convictions, which lie under the posthumous judgement of history and fate. Plato invites his reader, in short, to subject the symposiasts' respective notions of *erōs* to 'biographical criticism'. Second, Plato projects the speeches about *erōs* backwards to a period when Athenian power was at its height and all of the speakers were enjoying great personal prosperity.<sup>11</sup> The exuberance of Agathon and his guests, the brilliance of their conversation, and their supreme sense of self-confidence express not only a certain personal vitality but also the cultural energy of Athens at the moment of its hollow triumph in the first phase of the Peloponnesian War. All the persons depicted in the *Symposium*, moreover, with the possible exceptions of Aristophanes and Socrates (depending on how much of a Platonist you are), are poised on the brink of disastrous personal and political careers. By glancing back to a moment in time when the consequences of these men's convictions and choices had not yet unfolded, by retracing the stages of their precipitous decline to its imagined inception, Plato seems to locate a cause for the fall of Athens and for the ruin of its leading citizens in a failure of love, in the vicissitudes of a misguided *erōs*.

### III

The receding narrative frames accomplish another purpose, however, in which the erotic theory adumbrated in the *Symposium* appears to be directly implicated. The complex structure of

<sup>10</sup> Brentlinger, 5.

<sup>11</sup> For much of what follows I am indebted to Brentlinger, 5–6.

Apollodorus' narrative serves to illustrate that theory. For it manifests the workings of desire.

*Erōs*, according to Diotima, is a principle of self-perpetuation in mortal natures: it springs from a sense of lack, of limitation, pursues a fullness of being that forever eludes it, and in the course of that continuing struggle establishes a tenuous hold on existence, on presence. As a great daemon, *erōs* mediates between the divine world of being and the mortal world of becoming (202E 3–203A 1); as the offspring of *Penia* and *Poros*, of Poverty and Means, *erōs* is neither mortal nor immortal: rather, it oscillates continually between being and non-being, between presence and absence, by turns thriving and dying and coming back to life on the very same day (203D 8–E 3). These fluctuations reflect more than the periodic waxing and waning of sexual appetite. They describe the dialectic of presence and absence—of possession and loss, gratification and frustration, pleasure and pain—that structures the phenomenology of desire and informs the relation of the erotic soul to its objects. For it is the nature of beauty, and of all the objects we most passionately desire, everlastingly to renew the desire they defeat, at once ministering to our sense of lack and deepening it—like Shakespeare's Cleopatra in Enobarbus' famous description, who 'makes hungry | Where most she satisfies'. In such a precarious fashion *erōs* maintains identity through time: it represents an element of fixity amid the endless cycles of change; it is the source of whatever (illusory) permanence or continuity obtains in the realm of mortal affairs.

*Erōs* achieves its ends by means of procreation—by the continual production of something new or young to replace what is old and dying (207D 2–3, 208B 1–2). Among the beasts (207A 7–D 3, 208 A 7–B 5), and among those human beings who resemble them in so far as their erotic desire expresses itself in a bodily fashion (208E 1–5), procreation is a physical process of giving birth (*genesis*): one member of a species produces another to replace it and the race as a whole endures over time (207D 2–208B 6; cf. *Laws* 721 B–C). But procreation is not confined to the replacement of one individual by another in a species: it also takes place *within* each individual and secures a kind of identity for that person through time. Just as our hair and flesh and bones and blood and all our body is constantly dying and being renewed, so are our habits, character, opinions, appetites, enjoyments, pains, and fears all subject to fluctuation: the self is destroyed and reborn from one moment to the next (207D 2–E 5). The mind itself is

not exempt from our mortal condition (in Diotima's view, 207E 5–208B 4, if not according to the Socrates of the *Phaedo*).<sup>12</sup> The *tropos* (208A 7) or *mēkhanē* (208B 2), the procreative manner or mechanism internal to the human individual that is responsible for implanting permanence in the flux of thought, thereby enabling us to retain knowledge, is not *genesis*, or giving birth, however, but *meletē*: 'care', 'study', or 'practice' (208A 3–7). Practice preserves knowledge by recreating it anew and preventing it from being lost through forgetfulness.

The compositional form of the *Symposium* appears, in the first instance at least, to corroborate Diotima's erotic doctrine. The sequence of inset narratives effects the recovery of some historical incidents and some intellectual insights that might otherwise have been lost; it rescues them from human forgetfulness, enabling them (in Diotima's phrase) to partake of immortality (208B 3). Indeed, on a pious reading of the *Symposium*, the continual renewal and successful preservation of Diotima's discourse by means of the self-regenerating narrative represented in the Dialogue may furnish a clue to the sublime wisdom and beauty, perhaps even to the divinity, of her erotic doctrine. In any case, the series of receding narratives has the effect of making present to the reader a number of moments in the past, plucking them from the eternal flow of time and preserving them, stabilizing their identity without, however, denying their transience. The attempt to recapture lost time is marked by Plato (no less than by Proust) as an expression of desire: the successive narrators and enduring narrative of the *Symposium* enact the very processes of loss and renewal, of emptying and filling, with which Plato's Dialogue as a whole is concerned.<sup>13</sup> Such processes are familiar and characteristic effects of *erōs*. Desire makes itself felt in the impulse of each narrator to leave behind him another narrative to replace the one he had heard, which would otherwise have consumed itself in the course of its delivery and disappeared without a trace. Apollodorus' series of nested narratives exemplifies, then, the procreative labour of *meletē*: only by means of that continuing oral tradition has the knowledge of what was said and done at Agathon's victory-party been preserved—

<sup>12</sup> See R. Hackforth, 'Immortality in Plato's *Symposium*', *Classical Review*, 64 (1950), 43–5, and cf. J. V. Luce, 'Immortality in Plato's *Symposium*: A Reply', *Classical Review*, NS 2 (1952), 137–41.

<sup>13</sup> On the imagery of emptying and filling in the *Symposium*, see Steven Lowenstam, 'Paradoxes in Plato's *Symposium*', *Ramus*, 14 (1985), 85–104, esp. 88–97; also Rosenstock, who argues that 'The narrative frame of the *Symposium* . . . represents the life-giving power of philosophic speech.'

been captured and held fast in a force-field of desire—and thus been saved from dissolution in the endless cycles of becoming.

The opening clause of the *Symposium* explicitly identifies the preservation of the story as a product of *meletē*: *dokō moi peri hōn punthanesthe ouk ameletētos einai*, Apollodorus declares (172A 1), and he repeats his words, for additional emphasis, at the close of his introductory speech (*hōste, hopēr arkhomenos eipon, ouk ameletētōs ekhō*: 173C 1). The expression has given Plato's translators some difficulty,<sup>14</sup> but its significance is unmistakable: Apollodorus' language both anticipates and confirms Diotima's understanding of *meletē* as the procreative mechanism that rescues knowledge from oblivion by renewing it, by transmitting it from the old to the young—in this case, through an unbroken (albeit tangled) chain of oral narrative. Apollodorus effectively, if inadvertently, represents his account of Agathon's party as the product of a self-regenerating tradition of story-telling animated by the dialectic of desire. The *Symposium* is not only about *erōs*, then: rather, its complex narrative structure is itself designed to manifest and to dramatize the workings of *erōs*.

Narrative is the transmission of a *logos*—of a unitary discourse, a speech or story that is designed to be told. Narrative is thus the process or activity by which one *logos* gives birth to another. *Logos* is a vehicle of knowledge. The retention of knowledge over time is a product of *meletē*. *Meletē* represents an instance of the procreative impulse which achieves a certain stability and permanence in the boundless sea of becoming by replacing what is lost with a new version of itself. Procreation is the immediate aim of *erōs*. Therefore, the ultimate cause of narrative is desire.

But narrative can also be the object, as well as the manifestation, of desire—especially if it is a good narrative. The epic narratives of the archaic poets are a case in point. Both those poems themselves and the heroic deeds that inspired them are products of *erōs*, according to Diotima, in so far as they express a mortal creature's desire to perpetuate itself in the eternal memory of mankind. Lovers who are

<sup>14</sup> Shelley renders it 'I think that the subject of your enquiries is still fresh in my memory'; Jowett, 'Concerning the things about which you ask to be informed I believe that I am not ill-prepared with an answer'; Michael Joyce, 'Oh, if that's what you want to know, it isn't long since I had occasion to refresh my memory'; Walter Hamilton, 'I think I may say that I have already rehearsed the scene which you ask me to describe'; Nehamas and Woodruff, 'In fact, your question does not find me unprepared.' Closest of all to Plato's Greek is Bruce Rosenstock (in 'Socrates' New Music'), 'I believe I am not out of practice in what you are asking me about.'

spiritually pregnant give birth not to mortal children but to *aretē*, to 'virtue' or 'excellence'—precisely those heroic qualities of word and deed that achieve fame (*kleos*) and that make heroic accomplishments memorable across the generations (208C 4–209E 4). The goodness of the actions of Alcestis or Achilles arouses in us a desire to preserve the memory of such actions and of the persons who performed them, to possess them perpetually. The poet ministers to this desire and is himself its most eloquent instrument: his desire manifests itself by prompting him to conceive a virtuous offspring, an epic poem, which fixes the glorious deeds of the heroes for all time by enshrining them in a self-regenerating narrative—that is, in a narrative which is itself, by virtue of both the excellence contained within it and its own excellence as a narrative, an object of desire, something we wish to possess for ever. The narrative is preserved by being told, by being handed down in an oral tradition like the one responsible for preserving the story of Agathon's victory celebration. All such narratives, as well as the actions that inspire them, are 'images of excellence' (*eidōla aretēs*), declares Diotima, reserving the phrase 'true excellence' for what is generated by the man who ascends by means of contemplation to the vision of 'the beautiful itself' (212A 2–7).

Further details in this sketch of the erotics of narrativity can be filled in by glancing at Socrates' critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*. Although earlier in that Dialogue Socrates had declared that there is nothing disgraceful in the mere writing of speeches (258D 1–2), in the myth of Theuth he attacks the art of writing on the ground that it will promote forgetfulness in the souls of those who learn it by allowing the memory to fall out of 'practice' (*mnēmēs ameleiēsiai*: 275A 2–3). Writing will therefore destroy knowledge. For knowledge must not be conceived as something that can be captured by a written formula. Rather, it is a dynamic, self-regenerating possession of a living soul, dependent upon *meletē*; it is a continuing capacity to understand, and so it cannot be reduced to a set of mere propositions: it cannot be fixed in any static form. Writing can only remind us of what we already know (275D 1–2). The only sort of writing that can actually impart knowledge is writing that is inscribed upon the soul of the learner by means of dialectic—that is, by an art of living speech (276A 5–9) which takes into account the nature of its subject and the nature of the specific audience to whom it is addressed (270B 1–272B 2). Only such discourses as are engraved upon the soul deserve to be called 'legitimate children' (278A 6): these refer primarily to the *logoi* one has

conceived within one's own soul (278A 6–7), presumably as a response to the procreative stimulus afforded by an erotic encounter (cf. *Sym.* 280E 1–209E 4, 210A 7–8, C 1–3, D 4–6), and secondarily to whatever 'sons and brothers' (*ekgonoi te kai adelphoi*) one's own *logoi* may have engendered and properly raised up in the souls of others (*Phaedrus* 278A 7–B 2).

When these arguments are carried over to the context of the *Symposium*, they suggest that the discourse of Socrates—and, to varying degrees, of the other speakers at Agathon's dinner-party—was 'a living and animate speech by one who knows' (*Phaedrus* 276A 8), a progeny conceived and produced (in his case, at least) by a philosophical *erōs* for being and truth (cf. *Rep.* 485A 10–B 3, 490A 8–B 7, 501D 1–2) and/or by a more personal *erōs* for the beauty of Diotima's soul. It was itself a beautiful child, an image of excellence in both its content (Diotima's wisdom) and its form (which was superbly adapted to the needs of the audience), and it aroused in others the desire to acquire it, to retain it, and to make it their own. Thus, it engendered an entire family ('sons and brothers') of *logoi*, of reported speeches, any one of which is capable of awakening in a listener the same desire as the original—for the very reason that each is the living possession of its speaker, whose own *erōs*, expressed in the exercise of *meletē*, fixes the essential features of the *logos* (its message, rather than the specific verbal medium in which it is expressed) in the memory and thereby preserves its identity over time.<sup>15</sup> In the *Symposium* it is Alcibiades who makes this point. Turning to Socrates, he says, 'At any rate, whenever we hear other *logoi* from some other speaker—even a very good orator—virtually no one cares anything about them; but when anyone, whether a woman or a man or a little boy, hears you speak or hears your *logoi* from another speaker, even if the speaker is a very poor one, we are seized and swept away by them' (215D 1–6).

Here, then, is Plato's official explanation of his representational strategy in the *Symposium*. I call it 'official' because it seems to agree almost perfectly with the precise terms of Diotima's erotic theory. Alcibiades' remark, taken in the context of the *Symposium* as a whole, would appear to authorize something like the following set of

<sup>15</sup> The distinction between message and medium can be illustrated by the process of retelling a joke. A good joke retains the same power and punch, as well as much of the same propositional content, each time it is told, but each person who tells it changes somewhat the particular words in which it is expressed in order to adapt the joke to his or her own personality, to the character of the audience, and to the context of its telling.

inferences. Socrates' sayings, even when they reach us by second- or third-hand accounts, impress themselves in our memory by their beauty or excellence and thereby arouse in us a desire to retain the wisdom encapsulated in them; the *erōs* they awaken sets in motion the mental faculty called *meletē*, our capacity for attentiveness, care, or alertness, and we exercise that capacity in order to hold Socrates' discourses in our minds and memories, preserving the gist of what he said or what we heard. This highly charged erotic process is what gives rise to the elaborate and labyrinthine tradition of oral narrative which Plato portrays at the beginning of the *Symposium*.

The anti-type to Socratic dialectic is Lysianic rhetoric. Phaedrus is obliged to carry a written copy of Lysias' speech about with him: he is unable to retain it, because its glittering sophistries will not take root in the soul; he was struck by Lysias' declamation of it (*Phaedrus* 227A 1–C 5), evidently, and it is only this enduring enthusiasm which reanimates, however feebly, the speech in his own delivery of it (234D 1–6). But not even Phaedrus' charming delivery is sufficient to make Socrates remember Lysias' speech, and when he and Phaedrus wish to criticize it they are obliged to pore over the written text.<sup>16</sup>

#### IV

The *Symposium*'s apparently perfunctory dialogic opening plays a crucial role in Plato's larger argument for the erotics of narrativity. For it testifies in a direct and unmediated fashion to the allure of narrative; it presents narrative as an object of intense desire. The amazing strength of the longing precipitated in the listener by the excellence of Socrates' narrated words, of his reported speech, is dramatized in the dialogic preamble to the narrative in the *Symposium* by the eager insistence of Apollodorus' nameless interlocutors. Their determined request, voiced (apparently) before our text begins, reminds Apollodorus of the similarly pressing entreaties of Glaucon, only two days before, who—not content with an incoherent account originating with Aristodemus and passed on to him via *two* intermediaries—called after Apollodorus and said such things as 'I've just been looking for you', 'so tell me the story yourself', 'don't make fun of me—tell me

<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, however, Socratic dialectic proves no more immune to human forgetfulness, no more successful at achieving its own retention, than Lysianic writing. For more on the 'unofficial' doctrine of the *Phaedrus*, see n. 18 below.



when the party took place', and 'so tell me the story, won't you?' (172A 6–173B 7). A similar urgency drives Apollodorus' acquaintances to express annoyance with his protracted anecdote about Glaucon and to betray their lack of interest in Apollodorus himself (they dismiss his remarks as old news: he's 'always' the same, they say—the word *aei*, applied to Apollodorus, occurs three times in six lines to underscore their impatience with him—and they've heard everything *he* may have to say many times before: 173D 4–10); they have no use for him except as a conduit for the narrative, which they have resolved to hear: 'Just do what we asked of you—tell us the story of who said what' (173E 5–6).

To be sure, Apollodorus' interlocutors are not seekers after truth. They are wealthy businessmen (173C 6), *hommes d'affaires*, and—if we are to believe Apollodorus, an admittedly hostile witness—they are motivated not by philosophical *erōs* but by vulgar curiosity. Hence, Plato's dramatization of their desire in the dialogic opening of the *Symposium* has the effect of marking Apollodorus' narrative as an instance of gossip, a piquant and mildly scandalous tale repeated by one inquisitive neighbour to another. But to say that is not to join Apollodorus in denigrating the motives of his companions (or those of the other intervening narrators) as being different in kind from his own. For gossip itself reflects the operation of *erōs*. Plato, our supreme poet of the mixed motive, has devised in the form of Diotima's teaching a totalizing theory designed to explain the moral psychology of everyone—even, or especially, of those who repudiate or ignore it. 'Vulgar curiosity' expresses the same desire to obtain and retain noteworthy deeds, and reflects the same appeal exerted by Socrates' reported speech, as the reverent attentiveness of Apollodorus. Gossip, then, is a low-level form of philosophical discourse, and philosophy—whatever *else* it may be—is at the very least a high-class kind of gossip. Diotima's account of *meletē*, after all, was not intended to describe the mental equipment of the philosopher but to define the procedure by which we all preserve whatever knowledge we possess. If the story of Socrates' speech and conduct at Agathon's party is passed on from one person to another in the form of gossip, that is just another testimony to the reflected excellence of Socrates' words and deeds which inspire in others such a desire to retain them that they are told and retold until they achieve a perpetual hold on the collective memory. Or so the 'official' doctrine of the *Symposium* would have it.

Plato's combined use of dialogue and narrative in the compositional form of the *Symposium* may be understood in this light. Plato uses the

dramatic frame of the *Symposium* to stage the erotics of narrativity, to reveal narrative as both an expression and an object of desire—a means of gratifying the desire it incites and of renewing the desire it gratifies. Narrative itself is erotic in so far as the illusion of dramatic immediacy it provides typically serves to collapse the distance between the occurring and the recounting of an event, or between the characters in a tale and its audience, while the very fact of narrative serves to consolidate that distance, to institutionalize and perpetuate it. For narrative itself is a sign of a gap that has opened up between the ‘now’ of a telling and the ‘then’ of a happening, a gap that demands to be continually crossed and recrossed, if we are to succeed at reconstituting in imagination, however fleetingly, the lost presence of a past that is forever slipping away from us. By endlessly abolishing the distance it interposes and interposing the distance it abolishes, by making the past present without actually bringing it back, narrative at once satisfies and (re)generates desire: that is why we are both eager and sorry to come to the end of a good narrative. That is also why we never tire of retelling the same old stories (*Sym.* 173c 2–5). The erotics of narrativity display the same dialectic of presence and absence, of loss and renewal, that informs the erotics of sexual passion.

The *Symposium*’s dramatic frame also enables Plato to insert the reader into the erotic circuit that connects those who transmit and those who receive a narrative. By placing the reader outside the charmed circle of Socrates’ personal acquaintance, by making the reader a stranger to Socrates as well as to those for whom his words were originally intended and thus withholding from the reader—initially, at least—unmediated access to Socrates’ charismatic presence, Plato identifies us with Glaucon and with Apollodorus’ other, nameless interlocutors and he offers their desires as a model for our own. Their eagerness, their lively anticipation serve to boost the value of what we are about to hear, making us especially keen to hear it; like the laugh-track accompanying a televised situation comedy, their repeated requests for the story advertise its appeal and construct our own responses.

## V

But it is precisely at this point that we can no longer avoid confronting a significant problem for what I have been calling the ‘official’

doctrine of the *Symposium*. For although Plato locates us, his readers, squarely within the oral tradition of Socratic narrative (in which he often must have found himself), he also removes us, as the readers of a *written* text, from that tradition. We do not need to exercise the kind of care or practice required to hold words of wisdom in our memories, nor shall *we* be expected to transmit them to others by means of oral narrative, for we possess a finished transcript, and when in doubt we can always refer to the text. We share with Apollodorus' interlocutors only the experience of receptivity, of being the incidental and unintended audience of a narrative, those into whose hands it has fallen of its own accord. Otherwise, our relation to the narrative is a different one, an entirely *literary* one, and all the work to be performed by *meletē* has been transferred, in our case, to the sphere of interpretation.

At the conclusion of this paper I shall have something to say about the erotics of interpretation. For the moment, however, I want to linger over the multiple ironies occasioned by Plato's use of the *written* medium to celebrate the erotics of *oral* narrativity. These ironies proliferate beyond the simple *mise-en-abîme* effect, familiar from the *Phaedrus*, produced by any criticism of writing *in* writing; they go beyond the mere paradox that Socratic orality is the offspring of Platonic inscription,<sup>17</sup> that the logocentric world apparently glorified in the *Symposium* turns out, on closer inspection, to be an entirely logographic effect. They even go beyond the fact that Plato's 'official' justification of his representational strategy in the *Symposium*, a justification that revolves around the erotics of oral narrativity, is accessible only to a careful *reader* of the *Symposium's* text—inasmuch as that justification can be arrived at solely by means of the kind of intense, minute scrutiny and comparison of individual passages that a written text alone makes possible—and would not be accessible, I believe, to even an orally trained auditor of a vocalized performance. Rather, the ironies I speak of strike at the heart of the 'official' explanation of the relation between the compositional form of the *Symposium* and the erotic doctrine contained in it. Indeed, they even

<sup>17</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'La pharmacie de Platon', in *La Dissémination* (Paris, 1972), 69–197. For a brilliant and wide-ranging exploration of this paradox see the writings of Harry Berger, jun. In what follows I have been especially influenced by his 'Phaedrus and the Politics of Inscription' (unpublished MS), a somewhat garbled version of which has appeared in Bernard P. Dauenhauer (ed.), *Textual Fidelity and Textual Disregard* (American University Studies, ser. 3, Comparative Literature, 33; New York, 1990), 81–103.

call into question whether Plato's *Symposium* contains *any* erotic doctrine that can confidently be ascribed to Plato himself, whether the very notion of an erotic *doctrine* is not in Platonic terms a self-cancelling, self-refuting one.

Let us turn, then, to what might be called the 'unofficial' story about the erotics of narrativity that Plato has to tell us. The first thing to notice is that even in the dramatic register of the *Symposium* the theory of narrativity officially promoted by the Dialogue breaks down. According to that theory, the beauty or excellence of Socrates' discourses—even when they are conveyed by 'a very poor speaker' (*Sym.* 215D 4)—is supposed to focus the attention of the hearer and to impress the gist of those discourses indelibly on the hearer's memory, thereby facilitating the preservation of Socratic wisdom through oral transmission. The compositional form of the *Symposium* is supposed to testify to the triumphant power of this erotic dynamic, but Apollodorus' opening narrative of his recent conversation with Glaucon testifies instead to its failure. For, as Apollodorus tells his companions, Glaucon had been unable to obtain a clear account of Agathon's party from the person who had told him about it (172B 3–5), despite the fact that Phoenix, who had informed this nameless intermediary, had got the story directly from Aristodemus, just as Apollodorus himself had done (173B 1–4). The person who told the story to Glaucon, then, is no further removed in order of descent from 'the true account' than is Apollodorus' own audience—or the reader of Plato's text. And yet, Glaucon's informant "'couldn't say anything clear'" about it (172B 4–5). Indeed, he even left Glaucon under the impression that Agathon's party had taken place relatively recently, whereas in fact it took place more than a dozen years before, "'when we were still children'", as Apollodorus represents himself as telling Glaucon (172B 6–173A 8). In short, the *Symposium's* dialogic opening dramatizes the *loss* of Diotima's *logos* as much as it signals its retention (see also *Sym.* 178A 1–7, 180C 2).<sup>18</sup> Far from rescuing the memory of what was said and done at Agathon's from forgetfulness,

<sup>18</sup> Plato undoes the 'official' doctrine of the *Phaedrus* in a similar fashion, except that the subversive gesture occurs at the end of that Dialogue, rather than at its beginning. Socrates' living, dialectical exchange with Phaedrus climaxes in the working out of a rigorous distinction between rhetoric and dialectic, which Socrates arrives at by means of a laborious procedure calculated to exemplify the dialectical operations of division and collection. When the task is completed, Socrates triumphantly concludes, 'Now I think we have pretty well cleared up [*dedēlōsthai*] the question of art.' To which Phaedrus replies, 'Yes, we did think so, but please remind me [*hupomnēson*] how we did it' (277B 2–4, trans. Hackforth). So much for the vaunted ability of Socratic dialectic to

far from securing the preservation of Diotima's precious teaching, the process of narrative transmission is evidently just as liable to dissipate as it is to save valuable knowledge.

The clearest signal of despair, the most eloquent confession on Plato's part of his own lack of confidence in the *Symposium's* official doctrine of the erotics of narrativity, occurs when Apollodorus acknowledges that, not content to have got the story of Agathon's drinking-party from Aristodemus, an eyewitness, he checked 'a number of things' (*enia*) directly with Socrates, who confirmed the accuracy of Aristodemus' narrative 'with respect to each particular' (*kathaper*) contained in it (173B 4–6). Rather than trust to reports, to the all too obviously fallible vicissitudes of oral transmission, that is, Apollodorus goes straight to the source, blithely vaulting over the mediating narrator and collapsing the intervening narrative frame. What seems most disturbing about this procedure in the context of the *Symposium's* erotic theory is not that Apollodorus' decision to check Aristodemus' testimony against a more reliable source bespeaks an essentially *documentary* anxiety, one more appropriate to the correction and recension of a written transcript than to the verification of an oral history: the comparison of verbal eyewitness accounts, after all, is a standard element in Greek historiography (e.g. Thucydides 1. 22. 2–3). Instead, the truly discordant effect produced by Apollodorus' scientific collation of verbal texts—by this Platonic fiction of authentication, this dramatic illusion of historical accuracy—is that it ultimately serves to authorize one particular inscription: it privileges the version of events and speeches set down in the written document we happen to be reading at the moment; the accreditation it provides helps to underwrite the dramatic 'truth' of the individual narrative inscribed in the text of Plato's *Symposium*. Far from vouching for the efficacy of oral transmission and thereby vindicating the erotics of narrativity, Apollodorus' scruples merely establish the pedigree and authenticate the veracity of the story contained in a single text—a story whose precise features have at last been stabilized, fixed for all time, and conveyed into our hands by means of Platonic inscription. In this

arouse the hearer's attentiveness, to reproduce the content of its wisdom in the soul of the learner, and thereby to preserve itself from oblivion! Cf. G. R. F. Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas: A Study of Plato's Phaedrus* (Cambridge, 1987) [Ferrari] 207–8, who notes Plato's earlier, and pointed, use of *hupomnēsai* at 275A 5, D 1, 276D 3, 278A 1, but who concludes merely that Phaedrus 'risks dealing with the spoken word as if it were written'; Derrida, 'La pharmacie', emphasizes Plato's use of *hupomnēsai* and its derivatives without noting Phaedrus' terminal request for a reminder.

way, the conversation between Apollodorus and his friends that opens the *Symposium* does at least as much to privilege logographic inscription as it does to dramatize the erotics of narrativity.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, Plato calls into doubt the extent to which any narrative that actually succeeds in reproducing itself, as Aristodemus' narrative at least occasionally manages to do, can escape Socrates' critique of writing in the *Phaedrus* and qualify as a genuine instance of dialectical speech. In what way, after all, does Apollodorus' narrative distinguish itself from those stories that disintegrate in the process of transmission (such as the story of Agathon's party that reached Glaucon via Phoenix)? Does it not distinguish itself in being relatively stable and fixed in its features (not to say canned)—a recital that may require practice but that, once committed to memory, can be produced at any moment for the asking? Is there any indication that Apollodorus' narrative *is* in fact adapted to the needs of his specific audience, as true dialectical speech is said to be (*Phaedrus* 270Bff.)? The evidence, such as it is, tends to point in the opposite direction. Apollodorus seems to be reciting, without much discernible regard for the intervening change of audience, the very story that he had recited to Glaucon only a day or two before. Indeed, he promises his nameless companions that he will 'attempt to narrate' the story to them 'from the beginning, [just] as [Aristodemus had] narrated it' originally to him (173E 7–174A 2): being 'well practised' appears to signify to Apollodorus nothing more than the ability to reproduce exactly what Aristodemus had recounted to him. He never refers or even alludes to his auditors in the course of his recital, nor does he seem to take account of their personal attachments or predilections in the actual framing of his tale (except, perhaps, for his inclusion of moneymaking, along with gymnastics and philosophy, among the human pursuits that spring from an erotic impulse: 205D 3–5), so it is hard to know in what sense the story he tells is geared specifically to the persons he is ostensibly addressing. In fact, Plato implies that Apollodorus' story is *not* so geared: when Apollodorus gets to the end of it, he simply shuts off, like a gramophone record that has finished playing.

In this respect Apollodorus' narrative represents an instance of the

<sup>19</sup> The *Theaetetus* once again offers a point of comparison, inasmuch as the text of that Dialogue is an inscription that portrays a live, viva voce reading of the written transcript of a live conversation. 'So the Platonic dialogues seem to constitute both a reified displacement and a preservative "emplacement" of Socratic dialectic', comments Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (Baltimore, 1987), 31.

kind of oratory that Plato likens to writing.<sup>20</sup> In the *Protagoras* Socrates complains that 'if you should ask an orator a question, *they are like books*—unable to make any reply or to ask any question themselves; even if you enquire about something they said, however trivial it may be, they are just like a bronze gong that has been struck and that goes on noisily ringing unless someone takes hold of it—so these orators, in response to the slightest enquiry, spin out a long speech' (329A 2–B 1). The inability to answer questions and the tendency to go on saying the same thing for ever—which seem to be characteristic of Apollodorus and to account, at least in part, for his success at preserving and transmitting Socratic *logoi*—are cardinal features of writing, in Plato's eyes. He comes back to the topic<sup>21</sup> in a famous passage of the *Phaedrus*, where Socrates compares writing to painting and complains once again that written words 'seem to talk to you as though they were intelligent, but if you ask them anything about what they say, from a desire to be instructed, they go on signifying the same one thing for ever' (*Phaedrus* 275D 4–9, trans. Hackforth, adapted). Apollodorus' narrative, then, does not so much resemble dialectical speech as it does a written text. Instead of championing the erotics of oral narrativity, the dramatic frame of the *Symposium* would seem to promote a rhetoric of textual inscription.

A similar conclusion can be drawn from a glance at the philosophical pretensions of Plato's narrators. Apollodorus and Aristodemus claim to be living a life devoted to intellectual enquiry and (in that sense if in no other) to be Socratic philosophers. Apollodorus constantly rebukes his acquaintances for failing to follow his, or rather Socrates', example and for considering anything else to be of value besides philosophy (173A 1–3, C 2–D 1). He represents himself, via Glaucon, as a 'companion' of Socrates (172B 6) and he prides himself on the fact that for almost three years now he has been consorting with Socrates and making it his business to know, each and every day, everything that Socrates says and does (172C 4–6). He believes everyone to be wretched, save only Socrates, and although he does not except himself from the general human condition, he merely *supposes*

<sup>20</sup> A number of the contributors to Charles L. Griswold, jun. (ed.), *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings* (New York, 1988), emphasize that Plato's criticisms of writing extend to spoken discourse as well: see, in particular, Kenneth M. Sayre, 'Plato's Dialogues in the Light of the *Seventh Letter*', and Rosemary Desjardins, 'Why Dialogues? Plato's Serious Play', 93–109 and 110–25, esp. 110–11, respectively; so also Ferrari, 204–16.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Derrida, 'La pharmacie', 156, who connects the two passages.

himself to be in a bad way, whereas he *knows* this to be true of non-philosophers (173D 1–E 3)—a sly rhetorical move that seems to caricature the Socratic style of formulating knowledge claims.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Aristodemus figures (in Apollodorus' characterization) as 'the greatest lover of Socrates among the men of that era' (173B 3–4). But his devotion seems to express itself most visibly in an exaggerated aping of Socrates' personal mannerisms: like Socrates, Aristodemus is 'always barefoot', for example (173B 2; cf. 203D 1, 220B 6)—though Socrates himself dons footwear on special occasions (174A 4). For Apollodorus and Aristodemus alike, then, philosophy seems largely to consist in a personal, not to say idolatrous, cult of Socrates.<sup>23</sup> Instead of engaging in Socratic enquiry, they tell stories about Socrates.<sup>24</sup> They do not give birth to discourses themselves (but see *Sym.* 173C 3–4); they memorize and recite the discourses conceived by others. (If Aristodemus actually did deliver a speech about *erōs* at Agathon's party, he [or Apollodorus] seems to have forgotten it—a fact that is neatly obscured, in one of Plato's most inspired bits of dramaturgy, by Aristophanes' critically timed disruption of the original order of the speakers at the symposium.) Plato never represents either of his narrators *doing* philosophy: we never see either of them advancing or examining philosophical claims; we only see them recapitulating uncritically the philosophical claims made by others, most of all by Socrates. Far from being true philosophers, Apollodorus and Aristodemus appear to function entirely as sites of Socratic inscription.

In short, Plato would seem to have used the *Symposium's* dialogic opening to dramatize both the defeat and the excessive triumph of the erotic doctrine officially sanctioned by the Dialogue. On the one hand, the doctrine proves to be unsuccessful in so far as narrative is shown not to work as well as it might have been supposed to do: even a living tradition of oral narrative is insufficient, evidently, to capture, hold, and preserve precious knowledge. On the other hand, the official doctrine proves to be too successful in so far as narrative is shown to work better than it ought to do: when narrative does manage to contain

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Gregory Vlastos, 'Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 35 (1985), 1–31.

<sup>23</sup> For this, and for what immediately follows, I am indebted to Martha Nussbaum's formal commentary on the original draft of this paper.

<sup>24</sup> In this (as Nussbaum observes) they resemble Alcibiades, who similarly substitutes for an original discourse in praise of *erōs* a series of personal anecdotes in praise of Socrates and who, more than any other character in the *Symposium*, embodies the disastrous consequences of such a misdirected narrative desire.



and to transmit wisdom, to reproduce itself repeatedly and accurately, it reduces human storytellers to mere sites of textual inscription.

This combination of failure and over-achievement makes it possible to pinpoint elements in the *Symposium*'s official doctrine that ought to have aroused suspicion on first encounter. Let us look again, for example, at Alcibiades' testimony to the excellence of Socratic speech—the passage that is supposed to provide the key to understanding the bizarre compositional form of the *Symposium*. According to Alcibiades, 'whenever we hear other *logoi* from some other speaker—even a very good orator—virtually no one cares anything about them; but when anyone, whether a woman or a man or a little boy, hears you [Socrates] speak or hears your *logoi* from another speaker, even if the speaker is a very poor one, we are seized and swept away by them' (215D 1–6). This statement, if descriptively accurate (as the *Symposium*'s 'official' erotic doctrine implies), would bear witness to a quite remarkable, and highly unlikely, phenomenon. It would indicate that Socrates' discourses are so excellent that they transcend their specific verbal medium: they effectively trump any rhetorical strategy used to convey them and overcome any rhetorical ineptitude on the part of the speaker, acting as a kind of universal solvent on the words in which they are transmitted. A report of Socrates' *logoi* is therefore bound to be a sure-fire, fail-safe hit, because its value is supposedly independent of the form of its utterance. But is this in fact the case? Not only is Alcibiades' assertion suspiciously grandiose; not only is it belied as much as it is confirmed by the *Symposium*'s dramatic opening; not only would it, if true, render Plato's Dialogues indistinguishable in their effects from the writings of Xenophon and other Socratics: it also makes a mockery of the claims advanced on behalf of dialectical speech in the *Phaedrus*. Socrates' sayings, on Alcibiades' view, are intrinsically well adapted to the needs of *any* audience, no matter how deficient (woman, man, or boy). They do not have to be inscribed on the soul of each hearer by an art of living speech that takes into account the nature of its subject and of the specific audience to whom it is addressed. The speech of Socrates is allegedly universal speech, equally suited to any audience.

Now there is a kind of speech that *is* designed to be passed around indiscriminately among everyone and to work its effects indifferently on any audience it may reach. Socrates describes it in the *Phaedrus*: 'Once a *logos* is put into *writing*, it drifts all over the place, getting into the hands not only of those who understand it, but equally of those

who have no business with it' (275D 9-E 2, trans. Hackforth, adapted). Alcibiades' claim, which sounded suspiciously grandiose when taken to refer to the speech of Socrates, becomes much more plausible when applied to the writings of the Socratics, especially to Plato's Dialogues (even though the Socrates of Plato's *Phaedrus* would be the first to repudiate such an application of that claim). A *written* speech by Socrates, after all, will be just as good on every reading as it was on the first reading, and it is guaranteed not to suffer in transmission. Socrates' oral disquisition on *erōs* at Agathon's party might qualify, within the dramatic terms of Plato's fiction, as a true instance of dialectical speech and might claim to owe its preservation, within the fictional world of Plato's Dialogue, to being superbly well adapted to the needs of its original audience, but it is the written version of that disquisition, the version recorded in the text of Plato's *Symposium*, that would seem to have been designed to suit the needs of any audience, 'whether a woman or a man or a little boy'. In short, Alcibiades' praise ultimately redounds less to the virtue of Socratic speech than to the power of Platonic writing.<sup>25</sup>

Inscription is a trope of identity. It figures the repetition and reproduction, the maintenance and the preservation, of the same. As such, it can function as an image for the central and defining activity of *erōs* in Diotima's view, namely procreation. Diotima had described *erōs*, after all, as a principle of fixity in the realm of mortal affairs, a source of permanence or continuity amid the endless cycles of change. Like *erōs*, inscription also maintains identity over time, ensuring the transmission of the same: as Socrates repeatedly says, written discourse goes on saying the same thing for ever. But there turns out to be something highly questionable about the use of inscription to figure the procreative operations of *erōs*. For inscription maintains identity in a slightly but importantly different fashion from desire: it works by eliminating change, whereas erotic procreation works by means of change, by continually producing something new to replace what is being lost. Significant consequences result from this difference between inscription and procreation. Offspring are formally but not numerically identical to their parents, for example, whereas a text is numerically identical to itself in all of its inscriptions. Similarly, good sons (on the Greek view) resemble their fathers—but not to the extent

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Charles L. Griswold, jun., *Self-knowledge in Plato's Phaedrus* (New Haven, 1986), 224: 'Thus Plato's written dialogues are also better suited to creating that "immortal" [*Phdr.* 277A 2] chain of philosophers than is Socrates' spoken dialectic.'

of being identical to them, or mere simulacra of them, which is how a written copy or a transcript resembles its original. Procreation is not replication: the process of substitution, replacement, and renewal can never be perfect; if it could, *erōs* would enable us to achieve immortality in our own persons instead of only a pale semblance of immortality through our offspring.

Socrates demonstrates some recognition of this in the *Phaedrus*. Although he includes writing with sowing and begetting among the activities that figure dialectical speech and that by so doing serve to distinguish it, ostensibly at least, from rhetoric, he also describes the *logoi* that one's own *logoi* engender in others as 'sons and brothers' (*ekgonoi te kai adelphoi*) of the original *logoi*—as merely *related* to the original *logoi*, then, rather than as perfect copies of them (278A 7–B 2).<sup>26</sup> Still, Socrates' figurative use of writing alongside his metaphors of sowing and begetting has the effect of blurring the distinction between procreation and replication, making insemination (whether sexual or agricultural) into a trope for the regeneration of identity while making inscription into a natural mode of reproduction. As Harry Berger puts it, 'the emphasis is on the reproduction of the same, the suppression of otherness, and the more secure transmission guaranteed by the automatism of natural process'.<sup>27</sup> The result is to represent philosophical instruction from the student's perspective as an act of intellectual insemination by the teacher and to represent it from the teacher's perspective as an exercise in male parthenogenesis, an attempt to reproduce himself and his doctrines in the student. In this Socratic fantasy, philosophy is ultimately figured as homotextuality.

## VI

What I have been trying to suggest is that the *Symposium*, like the *Phaedrus* in its own way,<sup>28</sup> while seeming to privilege the erotics of narrativity, actually privileges writing over dialectical speech. Or, rather, it privileges dialectical speech in certain passages and privileges inscription in others. The Dialogue's 'official' position is balanced against, and undercut by, an 'unofficial' critique of that position, and

<sup>26</sup> See also *Phaedrus* 276E 6–277A 4, in which the notion of achieving immortality through procreation recurs in language reminiscent of *Sym.* 212A 5–7.

<sup>27</sup> Harry Berger, jun., 'Phaedrus and the Politics of Inscription'.

<sup>28</sup> See Derrida, 'La pharmacie', 171–2.

the praise we might have expected to be reserved for narrativity is in fact displaced on to—or, at least, shared with—textuality. Like Alcibiades, who arrives at the victory celebration intending to crown Agathon but who crowns Socrates instead of, or in addition to, him (213D 8–E 6), the *Symposium*'s purpose is deflected from its ostensible goal and redirected towards an unanticipated result. Despite its lack of a concluding logical or definitional impasse, then, the *Symposium* can still be reckoned an aporetic Dialogue, in so far as it calls into question the positive doctrine it seems to put forward.

Like Berger (and Stanley Rosen),<sup>29</sup> then, I read Plato in opposition to Derrida not as a metaphysical dogmatist but as a kind of deconstructionist *avant la lettre*, a cunning writer fully alive to the doubleness of his rhetoric who embraces *différance* and who actively courts in his writing an effect of undecidability.<sup>30</sup> The *Symposium* exhibits a series of alternating doctrinal and counter-doctrinal pressures, and interpreters of the Dialogue need to remain sensitive to each set of pressures. It would be wrong to conclude from my reading of the work that it contains no positive doctrine, that it lacks any genuinely Platonic philosophical content, or that it merely spoofs the notion of an erotics of narrativity, being wholly ironical in purpose and designed simply to demonstrate the futility of philosophical enquiry or to satirize the quest for a true doctrine. Such a conclusion would ignore the very real and considerable intellectual energy that Plato puts into the construction of theory and the formulation of doctrine. It would mistake the enormous seriousness with which Plato approaches the philosophical enterprise and it would fail to acknowledge the extent to which the erotic theory propounded in the *Symposium* actually succeeds in attaining to a high degree of both logical rigour and experientially descriptive power.<sup>31</sup> But without denying the positive philosophical thrust of the *Symposium* and the other Dialogues, we must also learn to come to terms with Plato's equally serious deter-

<sup>29</sup> In 'Platonic Hermeneutics: On the Interpretation of a Platonic Dialogue', in John J. Cleary (ed.), *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, i (1985) (Lanham, Md., 1986), 271–88, [Rosen], Rosen similarly defends Plato from Derrida's critique, though on somewhat different grounds.

<sup>30</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'La différence', in [Ouvrage collectif], *Théorie d'ensemble* (Paris, 1968), 41–66. Heraclitus had earlier pursued in his writings a similar effect, according to Harold Cherniss, 'Ancient Forms of Philosophic Discourse', in *Selected Papers*, ed. Leonardo Tarán (Leiden, 1977), 14–35, esp. 16–18.

<sup>31</sup> Within these methodological limits, then, I continue to stand behind the account of Plato's erotic theory which I offered in 'Platonic *Erôs* and What Men Call Love', *Ancient Philosophy*, 5 (1985), 161–204.

mination not to leave his readers with a body of dogma.<sup>32</sup> If my reading of the *Symposium* is justified, it would seem that Plato—in this one Dialogue, at least—systematically goes about undermining and subverting the very theories that his philosophical personae propound and that many elements of the Dialogue systematically combine to promote.

Plato's *Symposium*, then, leaves both its philosophical and its literary critics with a series of pressing questions which they will be hard put to answer positively and decisively. For example: Is Plato proposing a theory of the erotics of narrativity or is he criticizing such a theory? Does the literary form of the *Symposium* reflect or contradict the Dialogue's philosophical content? Does Platonic writing sustain or subvert the themes of Socratic speech? Does Plato do what Socrates says or does Socrates say one thing while Plato does another? If in fact there do not seem to be satisfactory answers to these questions, that is because both halves of the disjunctions they present accurately describe the textual strategies of the *Symposium*; it is because Plato has gone out of his way to withhold from his readers the means of sacrificing in good conscience one of the alternatives to the other.<sup>33</sup> The result, which the contemporary field of Platonic studies dramatically exemplifies, is to leave Platonic interpreters in a state of restless and urgent desire.<sup>34</sup>

And therein lies the clue, some readers will say, to solving the unresolvable contradictions in the *Symposium*'s theory and practice. The way to devise a new unified or synthetic reading of the *Symposium*, on this account, is not to attempt to reconcile its various internal contradictions but rather to transcend them by moving to a higher level of interpretation—to what might be called either a meta-philosophical or a metadramatic level of interpretation (it is not immediately clear which term would be more appropriate, for reasons that are significant and that will be explored below). Instead of attempting to discover the philosophical and dramatic unity of Plato's *Symposium*, to specify in exact terms its thematic and formal coherence, it might be possible to recuperate a unified, systematic

<sup>32</sup> I am grateful to Helen Bacon for emphasizing this point to me.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Ferrari, 210, on the question of the authenticity of the speech attributed to Lysias in the *Phaedrus*: Plato 'would have known . . . that he was seeding his text with a question that was likely to prove unanswerable'.

<sup>34</sup> Most recently dramatized by the essays collected in Griswold (ed.), *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings*.

interpretation of the Dialogue as a whole if one were to seek it at the level of the work's textual strategy, which, after all, is such an erotic one. This appearance-saving project should appeal to philosophers and to literary critics alike, inasmuch as both subscribe to principles that recommend it—to the principle of charity, in the case of philosophers, and to the Jamesian precept of granting the artist his (or her) *donné*, in the case of literary critics. At all events, the enterprise is not particularly strenuous: in order to salvage the unity and coherence of Plato's *Symposium* from its self-cancelling textual practices, one need only emphasize the erotic dimensions and consequences of its overall textual strategy.

Here is how such an interpretation would run. Plato's various doctrinal and counter-doctrinal gestures, his deliberate alternation of positive and negative moments, of theoretical construction and critique, produce in readers of the *Symposium* continual cycles of comprehension and incomprehension, constantly shifting proportions of blindness and insight. The perpetual loss and renewal of understanding on the part of the interpreter, to which such a procedure gives rise, reflects a familiar erotic operation, namely the dialectic of presence and absence that structures the phenomenology of desire—in this case, the phenomenology of hermeneutic desire.<sup>35</sup> True to its own theory, the *Symposium* lures us to interpret it and frustrates our efforts to interpret it, and the doctrine embedded in it seems forever to dissolve in our hands just when we thought we had finally grasped it. More truly an *erōtikos anēr* than the speaking Socrates whom his writing constructs as both an irrecoverable and a perpetually recovered philosophical presence, Plato artfully withdraws from us in the very act of appearing to surrender himself and his 'doctrines'. If, in short, the *Symposium*'s erotic theory ultimately fails to justify the compositional form of that Dialogue, at least it succeeds in describing and accounting for the dialectical alternation of comprehension and incomprehension that the *Symposium* generates in its interpreters.

## VII

There are difficulties with this appearance-saving move, not the least of which is the uncritical fetishizing of such values as 'unity', but it

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York, 1975) [Gadamer], 329–32.

would seem at first to be well grounded in the text of the *Symposium*. For Diotima treats interpretation itself as an erotic enterprise. One of the daemonic functions of *erōs*, she informs Socrates, is to serve as an interpreter between gods and men, filling and bridging the gap between beings who otherwise would never meet (202E 3–203A 4).<sup>36</sup> Hence, the whole art of prophetic interpretation (*hē mantikē*) depends on *erōs* (202E 7–203A 1); in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates teaches that *mantikē* and *erōs* are akin to one another in so far as they are both forms of beneficial madness (244A–245C, 265B 2–5).<sup>37</sup> But *mantikē* also has a role to play in the inner life of the human individual: it is needed to decode the prophetic language of the soul and to mediate between the levels of the psyche. Prophetic interpretation is therefore required in order to give human beings access to themselves, to negotiate the gap between the surfaces and depths of human motivation. Nothing so palpably breaches an opening in the soul, disclosing undreamt-of chasms within it—and, thus, nothing so urgently calls for an art of prophetic interpretation to reveal human beings to themselves—as the experience of erotic passion.<sup>38</sup>

It is a consequence of Plato's theory of desire, and of the transcendental ontology connected with it, that the lover's conscious wishes, the content of his or her mental representations, do not make manifest the objective structure of his or her intentionality: as Plato's Aristophanes establishes by means of his famous myth in the *Symposium*, the ultimate aim of erotic desire may remain enigmatic even to the most experienced lovers.<sup>39</sup> Those who spend their entire lives together 'could not say what they wish to gain from one another', according to Aristophanes. 'No one would think it was sexual intercourse, or that for the sake of sex each partner so earnestly enjoys his union with the other. But it is clear that the soul of each lover wants something else, which it is not able to say, but it divines (*manteuesthai*)

<sup>36</sup> On the mediating function of *erōs* see Jerry Stannard, 'Socratic Eros and Platonic Dialectic', *Phronesis*, 4 (1959), 120–34 [Stannard]. On interpretation as a power of *erōs*, see Rosen, 271, 283. On the connection between Plato's metaphysical theory of beauty and the metaphysical assumptions of modern hermeneutics, see Gadamer, 434–44.

<sup>37</sup> But cf. *Tim.* 70B–72D, where Plato appears to retreat from this sanguine view of mantic enthusiasm.

<sup>38</sup> Nothing, perhaps, except Socratic dialectic: for the correspondences between Socratic dialectic and Platonic *erōs*, see Stannard.

<sup>39</sup> I have argued for the interpretation summarized in this paragraph in 'Platonic *Erōs* and What Men Call Love', 168–9, 183–4, and in *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York, 1990), 125–7.

what it wants and hints at it' (192C-D).<sup>40</sup> Similarly, when Diotima announces to Socrates that the aim of desire is procreation, he remarks that it would take the art of divination (*manteia*) to figure out what she means (206B 9): Socrates, in other words, stands just as much in need of an art of prophetic interpretation to decode the enigma of the erotic aim, when Diotima articulates it, as do the most experienced lovers, when their own souls obscurely grope for a way of representing it.

Without successful interpretation, without the benefit of a glimpse into the deep structures of his or her motivation,<sup>41</sup> every lover would remain ignorant of the reason and purpose behind his or her own *erōs*—what Aristophanes and Diotima alike call its *aition* (192E 9; 207E 7; cf. 207B 7, C 7). The same model might be applied to reading, which resembles *erōs* in so far as it often seems to consist of apprehending something meaningful about a work without being aware of exactly what that something is. Only an art of interpretation can make the levels of literary meaning transparent to a reader, on this account, just as prophecy is necessary to render legible the depths of the human psyche. In love as in literature, human beings evidently require a Platonic analysis, of the sort Diotima performs on Socrates, in order to learn how to interpret the cryptic, prophetic messages that their souls are continually sending them.

*Erōs* breaches an opening in the soul only to close it; its prophetic utterance at once voices its meaning and necessitates an art of prophetic interpretation, an erotic hermeneutics,<sup>42</sup> to decode it. Interpretation, like desire, like narrativity, is both the solution to its own problem and the problem posited by that solution. For interpretation arises, on Diotima's view, only in response to a perceived loss of understanding;<sup>43</sup> it is only when meaning eludes an interpreter, when it starts to slip away from her, that she marshals the arts of interpretation in order to recapture it. Just as *meletē* manifests itself to the exact degree that knowledge is constantly departing from the knower,

<sup>40</sup> In the *Republic*, Socrates uses language similar to that employed by Aristophanes in the *Symposium* in order to describe our difficulty in apprehending the nature of the good: it is 'what every soul pursues, that for the sake of which it does everything, something whose existence it divines (*apomanteuesthai*)', but cannot seize upon; rather, the soul remains 'at a loss and unable to grasp adequately what it is' (505D-E).

<sup>41</sup> For Plato as a 'depth psychologist', see the eloquent and persuasive discussion by David K. Glidden, 'The *Lysis* on Loving One's Own', *Classical Quarterly*, 31 (1981), 39-59, esp. 46-53, and cf. E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Sather Classical Lectures, 25, Berkeley, 1951), 218.

<sup>42</sup> This is Rosen's phrase.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Gadamer, 301, 345-9, 429.



according to Diotima (208A 3–7), so hermeneutic *erōs* comes into being neither when meaning is fully present (and there is no need for interpretation to recover it) nor when it is entirely absent (and its presence is never missed) but only when it ostentatiously withdraws, leaving a trail of tell-tale traces behind it. At the same time as interpreters set out to regain lost meaning, however, their very activity is a sign of the distance that has intervened between the objects of their investigation and their own understanding of those objects, for interpretation effectively posits a lack of understanding as the condition of its own activity.

It is no accident, then, that Diotima, the personage who stands at the end of the hall of narrative mirrors that constitutes Apollodorus' tale in Plato's *Symposium*, is herself a prophetess—a professional interpreter. For Diotima is a figure of *différance*: she is a woman in a man's world whose characteristic gesture is one of deferral, of postponement or delay (staving off the plague), a mantic performance that mimics the work of the interpreter who, by her recuperative activity, both announces and, for the moment, prevents the arrival of understanding: she signifies that its advent—fatal to the continuing practices of philosophy and literary criticism alike—is imminent but not yet upon us.

## VIII

The unitary reading of the *Symposium* just proposed ultimately rests on the common element that Plato seems to find in desire, in narrativity, and in interpretation. Good narratives and cunning texts are like beautiful bodies, according to Plato: they excite desire and provide certain kinds of temporary, local gratification, without however yielding up the secret of their fascination. Rather, they renew desire even as they gratify it because the quality in them that awakens desire in the first place tends to recede as one approaches it, transcending as it does the particulars that instantiate it. Just as *erōs*, in Diotima's myth, mediates between being and non-being, constantly perishing and reanimating itself, so narrativity mediates between the past and the present, at once articulating and traversing the distance between them, and interpretation mediates between interpreters and the objects of interpretation, simultaneously advancing our understanding and deferring it. Chief among Plato's many achievements in the *Symposium*, on this reading of it, would be to have established an

analogy between sexual desire, narrativity, and interpretation in erotic terms and, at the same time, to have figured that analogy in his text. What Plato would seem to have done in the *Symposium*, then, is to construct a reflexive relation between the representation of *erōs* and the erotics of representation.

A similar strategy, carried out by quite different means, might also be discerned in the thematic disposition of the *Phaedrus*, in its joint meditation upon *erōs* and rhetoric. Although each topic is treated separately from the other, in its own half of the Dialogue, Plato seems to establish a dialectical interdependence between them by the mutually referential treatment he accords them. For in the *Phaedrus*, unlike in the *Symposium*, Plato does not depict people in the actual throes of erotic passion—he does not, that is, directly represent the experience of *erōs*. Instead, he stages erotic *fictions*: he has his characters make *speeches* in which they represent themselves as the subjects of hypothetical passions and he has them compete with one another in composing rhetorical simulations of *erōs*. Conversely, when the topic of the Dialogue turns from *erōs* to rhetoric, Phaedrus and Socrates do not merely discuss literary techniques in the abstract. Rather, they evaluate different kinds of compositions about *erōs* and they judge different methods of literary technique, at least in part, by their relative degrees of efficacy at seducing the mind (*psukhagōgein*) of the reader or listener. It is this very fusion of erotic and literary themes, this intimate association between the rhetoric of *erōs* and the erotics of rhetoric, that since antiquity has baffled those interpreters of the *Phaedrus* who insist on discovering the dialogue's unitary theme, its 'one true subject';<sup>44</sup> only recently, as Derrida reminds us, have commentators ceased to complain that the *Phaedrus* is badly composed.<sup>45</sup>

It is profoundly ironic, and potentially quite instructive, that the Platonic Dialogue responsible for introducing into the arsenal of literary-critical analysis the criterion of 'organic unity' (264c 2–5) should itself have been most persistently vulnerable to the charge of artistic disunity; it is similarly ironic that the Platonic Dialogue most centrally and explicitly concerned with questions of compositional form—of 'logographic necessity' (264b 7)—and, hence (one has every reason to believe), most deliberate and self-conscious in its textual strategies should itself have been most severely and protractedly

<sup>44</sup> See R. Hackforth, trans., *Plato's Phaedrus* (Cambridge, 1952), 8–9, for a survey of the ancient critical controversy.

<sup>45</sup> Derrida, 'La pharmacie', 74–5.

criticized for its alleged compositional flaws, most thoroughly interrogated about its own structural coherence (that is, its own *anankē logographikē*). What all these ironies suggest is that some relation of reflexivity between the representation of *erōs* and the erotics of representation obtains not only in the thematic structure of the *Phaedrus*, spanning and uniting the discussions of desire and rhetoric, but also in the interpretative situation that the Dialogue establishes with its readers, implanting in them a mingling of critical suspicion and hermeneutic desire that exactly mirrors the play of oppositions and correspondences between erotic desire and rhetorical technique in the thematic field of the Dialogue. That Plato's interpreters should have scrutinized the *Phaedrus* in exactly the same terms in which the *Phaedrus* represents its interlocutors as scrutinizing literary texts indicates, among many other things, something of the extent to which Plato's texts mimetically construct the desires of their readers, engaging them in a hermeneutic activity that imitates the philosophical activity of the interlocutors represented in the Dialogues. (Plato's texts read us, evidently, as much as we read them, even if they also seem to write, to *prescribe*, our own responses to them.) A similar claim might be made about the *Symposium*: Plato engenders in his readers a hermeneutic desire that prompts them to make speeches to one another about *erōs*, to discuss and theorize it in ways that mirror the philosophical activity of the interlocutors in the Dialogue. In so far as Plato can be said to have devised a reflexive relation between the interpretation of his erotic texts and the erotics of textual interpretation, and in so far as he can be seen to have dramatized that relation by means of the hermeneutic situations in which both the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* mimetically place their readers, Plato would seem to have secured the formal and thematic unity of those Dialogues. If in the case of the *Symposium*, then, the unity of form and theme had earlier broken down when the theory of the erotics of narrativity, on which it had been founded, collapsed, that unity can now be recovered—not at the level of philosophy or drama, to be sure, but at the level of interpretation.

## IX

But is *interpretation* what Plato wants us principally to do with his Dialogues? Do we read Plato rightly when we take his works as texts to

be endlessly interpreted, thereby treating them in effect as works of literature? And to the extent that our hermeneutic activity mirrors the philosophical activity of the interlocutors in the *Symposium*, will it be vulnerable to the same deconstructive critique? These questions bring us to our final topic, which is Plato's philosophy of writing—or, it might be better to say, his erotics of reading. In an earlier essay, I once argued that Plato's use of dramatic dialogue 'represents an attempt to recapture the original and authentic erotic context of philosophy—the exchange of questions and answers from which emerges, dialectically, an image of excellence: the lover's beautiful speeches. By its very form, then, the Platonic dialogue aspires to engage the reader . . . to awaken *erōs* in the reader—to arouse, in particular, his [*sic*] hermeneutic *erōs*, "the desire of the text"'.<sup>46</sup> But what is the *aim* of this textual desire, this hermeneutic *erōs* that Plato arouses in his readers? More specifically, does the reader of a Platonic text feel inspired to interpret the text, to reflect on the philosophical issues addressed in it, or to set about deconstructing the very distinction between philosophy and literature? The facile assumption of much current academic work in the field of ancient philosophy has been that there is little practical difference between the literary and philosophical approaches, that in order to interpret a Platonic text one has to philosophize and that in order to understand and criticize Plato's philosophy one has to know how to interpret his texts. Accordingly, my earlier formulation silently elided the distinction between literary interpretation and philosophy by emphasizing the erotic element shared by each and by invoking a hermeneutic *erōs* that supposedly spans both literary-critical and philosophical activity. It is now time to confront more squarely the difference between these two responses to Plato and to ask which of them answers more exactly to the desire that a Platonic text evokes in its reader.

The question proves, characteristically enough, to be undecidable. For Plato's philosophical representatives repeatedly assail the value of the very kind of literary interpretation which their creator repeatedly demands of his readers.<sup>47</sup> In the *Ion*, for example, Socrates scathingly characterizes all those who interpret the poets as 'interpreters of interpreters' (535A 9). In the *Protagoras* he goes further and mounts an

<sup>46</sup> Halperin, 'Plato and Erotic Reciprocity', *Classical Antiquity*, 5 (1986), 60–80, esp. 78–9.

<sup>47</sup> For a discussion of various ancient attempts to reconcile Socrates' denunciation of *mimēsis* in the *Republic* with Platonic practice, see Haslam, 23–4.

attack on the seriousness of all criticism of poetry: 'some say a poet means one thing, others say something different, all of them engaged in discussing [*dialegomenoi*] a matter that they are unable to resolve [*exelenxai*]' (347E 5-7). Socrates recommends that the assembled company turn its attention to philosophy instead, and the result—though identically inconclusive—proves to be more valuable. For now the irresolvable disagreement arises not between several interpreters but within a single philosopher, namely Socrates, who finds himself both affirming and denying the proposition that virtue can be taught, thereby discovering his own ignorance and acquiring fresh impetus for further enquiry.<sup>48</sup>

In the *Symposium*, what Socrates and Diotima say is pointedly at odds with what Plato does. The dramatic action of the Dialogue, especially the interaction between Aristophanes, Agathon, and Socrates, establishes the latter's erotic, intellectual, and even Dionysiac triumph over his rivals among the poets; in the terms of Plato's allegory, Socrates' ascendancy plainly represents the ascendancy of the life of philosophy over that of poetry.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, Diotima's failure to include literary texts (or other works of art) among the objects specified in her erotic curriculum implies that literature is not a worthy object of desire in its own right and that the study of it represents a dead end for the lover who aspires ultimately to apprehend the Form of the Beautiful. To fix one's gaze on a literary object, on the offspring of someone else's erotic activity, is a perversion of correct desire. And to interpret a Platonic Dialogue is in some measure to duplicate the idolatry of Aristodemus and Apollodorus, who confuse the vehicle of philosophy with its tenor and who canonize for others what they should be reinventing for themselves. For all that, and despite its own undeniable philosophical ambitions, the *Symposium* itself remains beyond dispute the finest work of fiction, of prose literature, to survive from the classical period—as well as one of the trickiest texts of all time to interpret.<sup>50</sup> If Plato did not want us to interpret it, why did he write it, and why did he write it that way?<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> I wish to thank Nicholas D. Smith for this reading of the *Protagoras*.

<sup>49</sup> See Bacon; Brentlinger; and Diskin Clay, 'The Tragic and Comic Poet of the *Symposium*', in John P. Anton and Anthony Preus (eds.), *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, ii (Albany, 1983), 186-202.

<sup>50</sup> In his essay on the *Phaedrus*, Harry Berger makes a similar point about the contradiction between what Socrates says and what Plato does in that Dialogue: 'It's a fine irony that the Platonic text whose aporetic play solicits the conflict of interpretations should represent speakers who propose the notion of a writing that is not

This question leads rapidly and directly to another impasse, to a final crux of Platonic undecidability. I am happy to report to those readers of Plato who may be worried that they are about to receive the sort of ultimate answer that will extinguish their desire and put an end to the dialectical play of erotic alternatives sustaining their tenuous existence—I am happy to report that this crux is an absolutely insoluble one. For in order to determine why Plato writes the way he does, whether he wants his reader to philosophize about the subject of a Dialogue or to take that Dialogue as an object of interpretation in its own right, it is necessary finally to determine whether Plato intends his Dialogues to be read as works of philosophy or as works of literature. And that question is notoriously unanswerable,<sup>52</sup> because—in the case of the *Symposium* at least—Plato says one thing and does another.

When it comes to taking sides, then, in what Socrates calls 'the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry' (*Rep.* 607B 5–6), Plato turns out to be a double agent—and to be such an extraordinarily skilful and devious one that it may ultimately prove impossible to determine where his primary loyalties lie. Plato's readers may try to remove the difficulty, to discover their author's allegiance, but in so doing will they be engaging in philosophy or in literary criticism? Plato exacts a high price, in short, from those who would presume to set a limit to the erotic play of his dialectic: he obliges them to recapitulate that dialectic in their own lives, to inscribe the very dialectic they had hoped to abolish in their own activity, and thus to become undecidable enigmas to themselves. So while we await the moment—if it should ever arrive—when we are catapulted out of uncertainty, out

something to be read, questioned, and interpreted but is, on the contrary, an ideal of psychic programming that would eliminate the danger and power of interpretive or interrogatory reading.'

<sup>51</sup> Perhaps Plato wished to demonstrate to his readers the futility of interpretation, but—if so—the lesson he wished to teach us is one we can only learn by failing. Like Alcibiades, who had to fall in love with Socrates in order to discover (if he ever did) how misguided it is to love Socrates as an individual, we can only realize how futile it is to interpret a Platonic text by trying to interpret it. Plato, on this view, does not want us to fall in love with his texts and so he invites us to fall in love with his texts so as to cure us homoeopathically, as it were, of our folly. Even on this interpretation, then, interpretation is both disease and cure, and the only solution to interpretation is more interpretation.

<sup>52</sup> Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven, 1979), 103, observes, Plato is one of those figures 'whose work straddles the two activities of the human intellect that are both closest and the most impenetrable to each other—literature and philosophy' (the other figures in de Man's reckoning include Augustine, Montaigne, Rousseau, and Nietzsche).

of the joy and agony of desire, into a realm of pure transcendence, the best that we can hope for is to work productively within and among the contradictions Plato has devised for us, not to put an end to the dialectic by resolving it in favour of one alternative or another and thereby closing down the circuit through which our desire circulates but to keep it moving so as to prolong the erotic tension that animates our existence as readers and lovers of Plato's texts. Platonic questions demand answers from us but at the same time they ask us to recognize, as we set about trying to answer them, that our task is one in which—to borrow the words of a favourite contemporary philosopher—there's no success like failure, and failure's no success at all.

*Literature Faculty, MIT*





# CHARACTER AND MEANING IN PLATO'S *HIPPIAS MINOR*

MARY WHITLOCK BLUNDELL

Then, I think, filling in the outline [the philosopher] would look frequently in both directions, both towards what is by nature just and fine and self-controlled and all the rest, and back to what he was making in human beings, mingling and blending from various pursuits the image of a man, taking evidence from that in human beings which Homer too called godlike and the image of a god.

(*Republic* 501 B)

## I

THAT Plato attached serious philosophical importance to literary character is well known. He returned time and again to the heroic figures of poetry, evincing a deep concern with the enormous cultural influence they exerted through education and other public institutions, such as festivals. He ardently resisted not only this influence, but the way it was inculcated through what seemed to him mindless emotional identification without real understanding (cf. *Rep.* 605c–606d). An integral part of his ethical mission was to come to terms with this pervasive influence. To this end he employed various strategies, of which the censorship proposed in the *Republic* is only the most obvious. Another is to evaluate the assets and shortcomings of traditional heroes like Achilles and Odysseus. Yet another is to co-opt

© Mary Whitlock Blundell 1992

I wish to thank Nick Smith for encouraging me to pursue this topic, and the following for specific comments: James J. Clauss, Ann Cumming, Mark Griffith, Michael Halleran, Gregory Vlastos. Parts of this paper were presented to meetings of the American Philological Association (Boston, 1989), the Classical Association of the Pacific Northwest (Victoria, BC, 1989), and my seminar on the sophists at the University of Washington (1990). I thank all three audiences for their remarks.

these figures, as Socrates does in the *Apology* by likening himself to Achilles (28C–D).

Given this urgent concern with literary character and its effect on an audience, we may plausibly expect Plato to put his own supreme skill at characterization to work in ways whose significance goes beyond the merely ornamental. In particular, we may expect a self-conscious concern with the protreptic and/or admonitory value of his characters. For Plato was well aware that the most powerful means combating the dangerous influence of traditional paradigms is to supplant them with different models for our emulation or avoidance. While it remains unclear precisely what kind of literature is to be permitted in his ideal state, it is to include the portrayal of good people (*Rep.* 395C, 396C, 607A), while bad ones may be represented for ridicule (396D–E).

Plato's own mimetic works provide us with a whole gallery of characters. The greatest and most fully realized of these is Socrates, who appears, much of the time, as Plato's tragic hero, his response to the great figures of epic and drama.<sup>1</sup> As such he often plays a protreptic role which counterbalances the negative treatment of his elenctic interlocutors.<sup>2</sup> Some of the latter are villains like Thrasymachus. He is portrayed in *Republic* I as a dangerous threat, but as the work progresses we see him worsted in argument and subsequently falling under Socrates' spell (358B, 498C–D), thus pointing an appropriate philosophical moral. Here, then, is one integral function of characterization in the dialogues: it gives concrete form to the intellectual and ethical challenges faced by Socrates, and thus enhances the significance and decisiveness of his victories. In doing so it provides the reader or auditor with both protreptic and cautionary models.<sup>3</sup>

Plato's skilfully delineated characters are essential to the dramatic impact of his dialogues. One effect of this dramatization of philosophy

<sup>1</sup> See E. Wolff, *Platos Apologie* (Berlin, 1929), chs. 3–4; T. Irwin, 'Socrates and the Tragic Hero' ['STH'], in P. Pucci (ed.), *Language and the Tragic Hero* (Atlanta, 1988), 55–83; M. W. Blundell, *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies: A Study in Sophocles and Greek Ethics* [HFHE] (Cambridge, 1989), 8–9.

<sup>2</sup> See C. Kahn, 'Drama and Dialectic in Plato's *Gorgias*' ['DD'] *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 1 (1983), 113–21; and cf. *Sym.* 215B–216C.

<sup>3</sup> I include auditors both because of the ancient practice of reading aloud and because silent bystanders are often mentioned in the dialogues. On the value of the Socratic elenchus for the latter cf. M. L. McPherran, 'Socrates and the Duty to Philosophize', *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 24 (1986), 552–3.

is to draw the reader or auditor personally into the discussion.<sup>4</sup> A vivid character, whether in life or on Plato's pages, is more likely than a mere cipher or yes-man to provoke readers or bystanders into emotional engagement and intellectual response. Characterization is thus instrumental in eliciting audience participation in the Platonic drama, and hence in fostering the enduring life of Platonic dialectic.

The aspect of Platonic characterization that has received most attention in recent years is its relationship to Socratic dialectic. It allows Plato to illustrate the responsiveness of dialectic to the particular personality and circumstances of each interlocutor,<sup>5</sup> and is especially integral to the dramatic representation of the elenchus. Socrates does not just refute arguments, he refutes people, in such a way as to cast doubt not merely on their beliefs, but on the personality, way of life, and social role that condition those beliefs.<sup>6</sup> The elenchus is thus an intrinsically *ad hominem* form of argument of a peculiarly personal kind. If its force is to be fully appreciated, the particular character of each interlocutor, those aspects of their lives and personalities that make them respond as they do, must be made present to the reader—a task to which dramatic characterization is eminently suited.

A related function of characterization is the role it plays in the Socratic effort, continued by Plato, to identify promising philosophical talent. This is implicit in Socrates' divine mission, expounded in the *Apology*, which drives him to try to discover who is really wise (21 B–23 B). The elenctic dialogues dramatize his generally unsuccessful attempts to do this. Through his portraits of individual respondents Plato demonstrates the sources of their failure. These sources are many and various. Socrates' interlocutors suffer from a whole spectrum of human weaknesses and failings, whether moral, intellectual, or both, which interfere with their ability to philosophize. In theory the elenchus, despite its negative character, should eventually lead to more positive kinds of understanding. Yet in practice Socrates' interlocutors rarely seem to progress from elenctic

<sup>4</sup> See A. Koyré, *Discovering Plato* [DP], Eng. trans. (New York, 1945), 3–7.

<sup>5</sup> See L. Coventry, 'The Role of the Interlocutor in Plato's Dialogues: Theory and Practice', in C. Pelling (ed.), *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature* (Oxford, 1990), 174–96.

<sup>6</sup> On the personal character of the elenchus see R. Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic* [PED], 2nd edn. (Oxford 1953), 15–16; N. Gulley, *The Philosophy of Socrates* [PS] (London, 1968), 59–60; Kahn, 'DD'; M. Stokes, *Plato's Socratic Conversations* [PSC] (London, 1986), ch. 1.

bewilderment to increased philosophical insight. This is, at least in part, a consequence of their particular talents and personalities.

This paper offers a reading of a single dialogue in an attempt to bring out the importance of characterization and show how Plato puts it to work in these various ways. *Hippias Minor*, as an early elenctic dialogue with a vividly characterized interlocutor, is well suited to the purpose.<sup>7</sup> Characterization is intrinsic to Plato's portrayal of the personal and philosophical significance of Hippias' encounter with Socrates. Hippias is an important target, in so far as he embodies the public success of a certain kind of claim to wisdom, and his dialectical failure is shown to result from this success and the status which attends it, as well as his personal limitations. At the same time the dialogue offers another perspective on character, for one of its central concerns is the educational value of traditional literary figures. The Homeric opening of the work has sometimes been treated as a philosophically uninteresting preamble, or, in A. E. Taylor's words, 'a mere peg on which to hang a discussion of the purely ethical problem in which Socrates is really interested'.<sup>8</sup> The central Homeric section has similarly been dismissed as one of 'a few humorous digressions', an 'interlude' or 'resting place',<sup>9</sup> or an 'intermezzo',<sup>10</sup> while Vicaire views Homer and his heroes throughout as mere 'pretexts'.<sup>11</sup> But as we shall see, the Homeric theme is internally related to the characterization of the *dramatis personae*, so that the elenchus of Hippias cannot be properly understood outside its Homeric context.<sup>12</sup>

*Hippias Minor* is, among other things, a portrayal of the fruits of traditional forms of education and their sophistic heirs.<sup>13</sup> This educational significance can only be understood in the light of the dramatic context, in particular the work's Homeric opening. The introductory dialogue not only introduces the characters who will determine the course of the conversation, but establishes the cultural milieu in which they are embedded, and raises questions of education

<sup>7</sup> It is generally agreed to be among Plato's earliest works. Its authenticity has rarely been questioned, thanks in part to a reference in Aristotle (*Metaph.* 1025<sup>a</sup>6–13).

<sup>8</sup> A. E. Taylor, *Plato: The Man and his Work*, 7th edn. (London, 1960), 35.

<sup>9</sup> T. Gomperz, *Greek Thinkers [GT]*, ii, Eng. trans. (New York, 1905), 292.

<sup>10</sup> G. Calogero (ed.), *L'Ippia Minore [IM]* (Florence, 1948), xiii.

<sup>11</sup> P. Vicaire, *Platon: Critique littéraire* (Paris, 1960), 21–2.

<sup>12</sup> A prima-facie case for seeking a unified reading of any of Plato's dialogues is provided by his own remarks on organic unity in literature (*Phaedrus* 264c).

<sup>13</sup> C. Ritter saw education as the key to *H. Min.* (*The Essence of Plato's Philosophy [EPT]*, Eng. trans. [London, 1933], 38–40), but did not develop the idea. Cf. also M. Pohlenz, *Auf Platons Werdezeit [PW]* (Berlin, 1913), 68–9.

and literary character, thus alerting us to their importance for the dialogue as a whole. Plato himself will follow the educational traditions of his culture by using archetypal heroes to examine aspects of moral and intellectual character. These issues are inherent in the dramatic setting, and are explored through characterization as well as argument. For the participants in the discussion, themselves literary characters of Plato's creation, will become latter-day ethical models for our inspection.<sup>14</sup>

Only when both these aspects of character—Plato's scrutiny of Homer's characters and his own use of characterization—receive due weight can *Hippias Minor* be properly appreciated. Attention to the arguments alone, bereft of their broader dramatic and cultural context, is one cause of the irritation this dialogue often inspires.<sup>15</sup> The arguments should not, however, be seen in isolation, but as part of a larger pedagogical strategy, which pits Socrates against both traditional and sophistic educational methods. The Socratic alternative is rooted not in the praise or criticism of stereotypical models, but in the individual character of the interlocutor.

## II

Hippias is fresh from delivering a public lecture on Homer.<sup>16</sup> The occasion is probably that alluded to in *Hippias Major*, where the sophist mentions that he will shortly deliver a prepared speech in 'the school of Pheidistratus' at the request of Eudicus, son of Apemantus (*H. Ma.* 286B).<sup>17</sup> Be that as it may, the occasion is represented as a

<sup>14</sup> Cf. M. J. O'Brien, *The Socratic Paradoxes and the Greek Mind* [SPGM] (Chapel Hill, 1967), 100–3.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* [HGP], iv (Cambridge, 1975), 195.

<sup>16</sup> On Hippias and his thought see D. Tarrant, *The Hippias Major Attributed to Plato* [HM] (Cambridge, 1928), xvii–xxx; R. G. Hoerber, 'Plato's *Lesser Hippias*' ['LH'], *Phronesis*, 7 (1962), 122–4; K. Freeman, *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers* [PP], 3rd edn. (Cambridge, Mass., 1966), 381–91; Guthrie, *HGP* iii. 280–5; G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* [SM] (Cambridge, 1981), 46–9. For the sophists' use of poetry in education see Stokes, *PSC* 196–7, and cf. *Prot.* 338E–347A. For their interest in Homer cf. *Isoc.* 12. 18 and see R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship* [HCS] (Oxford, 1968), 35–8; W. J. Verdenius, 'Homer, the Educator of the Greeks' ['Homer'], *Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen*, 33. 5 (1970), 9. The moralizing interpretation of Homer attributed to Hippias of Thasos by Aristotle (*Pa.* 1461<sup>a</sup>21–3) may belong to our Hippias (Freeman, *PP* 383–4).

<sup>17</sup> The connection is strongly suggested by the role of Eudicus and the Homeric subject—Nestor's advice to Neoptolemus. Judging from *H. Min.*, Nestor probably

public one, and Hippias deems it appropriate to adopt the same attitude as in his performances at the Olympic Games (363C–364A). Such festivals included competitive public displays by Homeric rhapsodes, some of whom would expound the poet's meaning as well as reciting his verses (*Ion* 530A–D, 533C).<sup>18</sup> They also provided an arena where sophists could show off their expertise and display their intellectual wares (cf. 368B). On such occasions Hippias and Gorgias would don the rhapsode's purple robe, 'as though to emphasize their continuation of the functions of poets in earlier days'.<sup>19</sup> The forum was one where excellence of mind as well as body was on display for the admiration and scrutiny of all, in keeping with the Homeric ideal of manhood, 'to be a speaker of words and a doer of deeds' (*Il.* 9. 443; cf. *H. Min.* 364A 3–6). Just as he would at the games, then, Hippias makes himself freely available for questioning (363C 7–D 4; cf. *Prot.* 315C).<sup>20</sup>

Socrates is found at the outset in the atypical role of silent listener (364A 1–2). This is contrasted with and directly related to the abundance of Hippias' display speech (*epideixis*),<sup>21</sup> which Socrates was unwilling to interrupt (364B 5–8). By suggesting that questions during the speech would have been 'troublesome' (364B 7–8), Socrates hints

advised Neoptolemus to emulate Achilles rather than Odysseus. On this 'Trojan discourse' see M. Untersteiner, *The Sophists*, Eng. trans. (New York, 1954), 273. For the sophistic use of legendary figures to purvey moralizing advice to the young cf. Prodicus' fable of the choice of Heracles (*Xen. Mem.* 2. 1. 21–34).

<sup>18</sup> The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were recited in full every four years at the Panathenaea. On rhapsodes see H. Flashar, *Der Dialog Ion als Zeugnis platonischer Philosophie [Ion]* (Berlin, 1958), 21–6; G. S. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer* (Cambridge, 1962), 302–3, 312–15. Xenophon's Niceratos admits to having heard them 'nearly every day' (*Xen. Sym.* 3. 6, where Socrates' low opinion of them is also attested; cf. also *Mem.* 4. 2. 10). Note that Ion's exposition is called a 'display' (*epideixis*) (*Ion* 530D, 541D; cf. n. 21 below).

<sup>19</sup> Kerferd, *SM* 29. For the connection between poets, rhapsodes, and sophists cf. *Prot.* 316C–D and see further Flashar, *Ion*, 26; Pfeiffer, *HCS* 16; Guthrie, *HGP* iii. 42–3; W. Jaeger, *Paideia*, i, Eng. trans., 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1945), 296; M. Griffith, 'Contest and Contradiction in Early Greek Poetry', in M. Griffith and D. J. Mastrorade (eds.), *Cabinet of the Muses* (Atlanta, 1990), 185–207. Homer himself was popularly conceived as a rhapsode (e.g. *Rep.* 600D 5–6).

<sup>20</sup> For the willingness of other sophists and rhetoricians to answer questions cf. *Prot.* 318D, *Gorg.* 447C–448A, *Meno* 70B–C.

<sup>21</sup> This noun and its cognate verb are used repeatedly for Hippias' oration (363A 2, 363C 2, 363D 2, 364B 6, 364B 8; cf. also 368C 5). On these displays see Guthrie, *HGP* iii. 41–2; Kerferd, *SM* 28–9. For Hippias' interest in rhetoric cf. *H. Ma.* 285C 7–D 1, *Phaedrus* 267B. On his style see Woodruff, *Plato: Hippias Major [HM]* (Oxford, 1982), 125–7, 132–3, and cf. 121 n. 12. Cf. also *H. Ma.* 282A, 291D, 301B with Tarrant, *HM* xxiv–xxv, and the notes ad loc. of R. Waterfield, *Hippias Minor*, translation, introduction, and notes [*HM*], in T. J. Saunders (ed.), *Plato: Early Socratic Dialogues* (Harmondsworth, 1987).

at the inadequacy of this mode of discourse to deal with the intellectual challenge of dialectic. Now that the display is over, however, Hippias is ready to entertain the questions from the audience which were a regular feature of such appearances.<sup>22</sup> Socrates' friend Eudicus is surprised at his silence,<sup>23</sup> expecting him either to contribute to the general admiration of Hippias or to subject him to elenchus, especially since all those who are left can make some claim to an interest in philosophy (363A 1-5). In response to Eudicus' enthusiasm Socrates agrees to question the sophist, now that the company is smaller (364B 8-9). He invites Hippias to 'teach' them 'clearly' about the Homeric heroes who were the subject of his discourse (364C 1), this time using the dialectical method of question and answer. He thus implies that the display was deficient in both clarity and educational worth, and inappropriate to the 'teaching' of a small and intellectually serious audience. Hippias rejects this implication by answering that he is willing to explain 'still more clearly than before' his views 'about both these [men] and others' (364C 3-4).

As a professional sophist Hippias subscribes to the fundamental virtue of consistency: it would be 'strange' or 'extraordinary' (*deinos*), he says, to deviate from his usual availability to all comers (363C 7-D 4). A little later he again associates his willingness to answer with his profession as a paid educator, using a similar form of expression (364D 3-6). Consistency of word and deed (living up to one's claims) is a basic requirement of morality, and Hippias' language accordingly suggests that this is an obvious matter of propriety as well as professional pride: such inconsistency would not only be *deinos*, but shameful (*aiskhros*) (364D 3; cf. *Gorg.* 458D). Here and elsewhere, his language characterizes him as a voice of conventional, common-sense values. He particularly favours the potential optative, used most frequently with the adjective *deinos*, which reveals his conventional quality of mind: anything that departs from the obvious is 'strange' or 'extraordinary' to him.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> On these two sophistic methods (continuous oration and question and answer) see Guthrie, *HGP* iii. 41-2; Kerferd, *SM* 32-4. On the relationship between sophistic methods and Socratic dialectic see Gulley, *PS* 22-37.

<sup>23</sup> For δὲ δῆ (363A 1) in a surprised question see J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1954), 259. Mark Griffith has suggested to me that Socrates' initial silence conveys a lack of interest in Hippias (cf. 369D 5-E 2). But Socrates does have a question ready which he is eager to ask (363A 6-B 1, B 6-7).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. 363C 7, 365C 7, 375D 3, *H. Ma.* 292C 1. Socrates mockingly echoes his use of *deinos* at the end of the dialogue (376C 5; cf. also *Xen. Mem.* 4. 4. 6). For the potential optative cf. also 364D 3, 371E 9-372A 2.

Hippias' confident, didactic, and patronizing manner should doubtless be construed at least in part as a promotional gambit, a way of instilling public confidence in his professional services. Yet these passages also show an acute awareness of his *métier* as a sophist and the responsibilities this entails. Unlike, for example, Thrasy-machus (*Rep.* 337D), he is willing to talk to Socrates without insisting on a fee: responding to questions is a matter of professional pride, not merely of immediate profit,<sup>25</sup> and he is confident that he can deal with Socrates like any other questioner (363C 7–D 4, 364D 3–6).<sup>26</sup> His professional status also commits him to intellectual rigour,<sup>27</sup> and hence to consistency of another kind—the intellectual consistency essential to rational thought and argument, by which Socrates himself set such store.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, it is Hippias himself who is responsible for the topic under discussion, on which he is a self-professed expert.<sup>29</sup> His views on the subject have been publicly expressed in the presence of these and many other witnesses, and his language suggests a considered position, not off-the-cuff argument (λέγω, φημί 364C 4). The context thus makes him fair game as a Socratic target.<sup>30</sup> He should be strongly placed to resist dialectical coercion, and has less excuse than any casual interlocutor if he comes to grief.

Socrates exclaims in wonder at Hippias' confidence 'about your soul with regard to wisdom' (364A 1–6).<sup>31</sup> The choice of words reflects his own characteristic concerns (cf. *Ap.* 29D–30B), and sets up Hippias

<sup>25</sup> For Hippias' large earnings see *H. Ma.* 282D–E and cf. 281B, 300D. For sophistic earnings generally cf. *H. Ma.* 282B–D and see Guthrie, *HGP* iii. 36; Kerferd, *SM* 26–8. The antithesis at 364D 3–6 suggests that Hippias is not being paid in this instance (cf. also *H. Ma.* 283B–284C), nor (if Plato is to be believed) was he paid on his frequent visits to Sparta (*H. Ma.* 283B–C). But such performances might give rise to future commissions or other benefits (cf. *H. Ma.* 281A, C).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *H. Ma.* 286E 5–287A 1, 287A 8–B 3.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *H. Ma.* 289E–290A, *Prot.* 361A–C; Stokes, *PSC* 32; T. Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory: The Early and Middle Dialogues [PMT]* (Oxford, 1977), 24.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Ap.* 27A, *Crito* 46B–C, *Gorg.* 482B–C, 487B, 490E, 491B, 495A. At *Xen. Mem.* 4. 4. 6 Socrates hints that Hippias' polymathy conflicts with this ideal.

<sup>29</sup> At *H. Ma.* 287A–B he boasts that he can teach Socrates to answer even the most difficult questions, in particular those arising from his 'Trojan discourse' (286A–287C).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. also the self-advertising boast overheard by Socrates in the public arena of the Agora (368B 4–5; cf. *Ap.* 17C and Calogero ad loc.).

<sup>31</sup> Hippias' 'wisdom' is ironically emphasized throughout (364A 2, 364B 2, 366D 3–5, 367A 4, 368B 2–5, 368C 5, 369D 1–E 2, 372A 6–C 2, 376C 4). Cf. also *H. Ma.* 281A 1, B 5–6, 282E 9–283A 2, 283C 3–4, 286D 5, 289A 5–6, 291A 7–8, 304C 3, *Prot.* 337E 6–7.



as a potential source of philosophical enlightenment (364A 2).<sup>32</sup> The tone suggests that Hippias' faith in his intellect can scarcely be justified (364A 3-6), but here as elsewhere the sophist appears oblivious to Socrates' irony.<sup>33</sup> He does, however, produce a reasonable self-justification. Using an expression characteristic of the rhetoricians, he says his confidence is 'plausible', for he has never been beaten before (364A 7-9).<sup>34</sup> This self-assurance is vindicated by the reception of the speech he has just delivered (cf. 363A 2). His criterion for success is the applause of an audience, the judgement of the many.<sup>35</sup> In these terms, his confidence is fully justified.<sup>36</sup> It is rooted in a cultural milieu that fosters and rewards such teachers and performers as himself, both financially and with other public honours, such as ambassadorships (*H. Ma.* 281A-B; cf. 282B). This milieu reinforces the confidence that renders him blind to his own failings and hence incapable of perceiving his own ignorance—the essential starting-point, according to Socrates, on the path to true wisdom. It is as a sophist who knows how to succeed in his *métier* that Hippias is riding for a Socratic fall. For to Socrates, who values the judgement of a single wise person over that of the many (*Crito* 47A-48A), the approval of Hippias' audiences is less than worthless as evidence of his wisdom.<sup>37</sup> This is hinted at in Socrates' ironic

<sup>32</sup> For the sophists' influence on the soul cf. *Prot.* 313A-314B, *Soph.* 223E-224C. For the emphasis on the soul in *H. Min.* cf. Tarrant, *HM* xxxi.

<sup>33</sup> This heavy irony is also found in *H. Ma.*, and there is even a trace of it in Socrates' conversation with Hippias in Xenophon. Kierkegaard notes *Mem.* 4. 4. 6 as an exception to the general absence of irony in the *Memorabilia* (*The Concept of Irony*, Eng. trans. [London, 1966], 64 n., cited by G. Vlastos, 'Socratic Irony ['SI']', *Classical Quarterly* 37 [1987], 85 n. 26; cf. also *Mem.* 4. 4. 8). But Xenophon may not be independent of Plato here (see Hoerber, 'LH' 123 n. 4; Freeman, *PP* 390; Tarrant, *HM* xv, xviii; cf. also *Gorg.* 490E). Only in Xenophon does Hippias complain of Socratic mockery (*Mem.* 4. 4. 9; cf. 4. 4. 11).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *H. Ma.* 285E 10-11. For 'plausibility' (εἰκός) as the aim of rhetoric cf. *Phaedrus* 267A 6-7.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *H. Ma.* 281C 2-3, 284C 8, 285B 3-4, 288A 3-5, 289E 4, 292E 4-5. But at *H. Ma.* 284E 4-5 Hippias also agrees that the many do not know the truth. It is therefore not surprising that he suffers in that dialogue from a distinct lack of dialectical integrity (292B 7, 298B 5-6; cf. Tarrant, *HM* xxx; Woodruff, *HM* 132). In *Protagoras* he makes a methodological proposal of which everyone but Socrates approves, based not on concern for the truth, but on compromise and the adoption of an arbitrary umpire (himself!) (338A). This fits well with his portrait in the *Hippias* dialogues as one whose goal is to satisfy everyone (cf. *H. Ma.* 285D 6-E 2, where he says he has been 'forced' to learn certain subjects to please his audience). But Woodruff goes too far in elevating this trait into a 'philosophy of agreement' (*HM* 129, cf. 125).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Woodruff, *HM* 127-8.

<sup>37</sup> Woodruff rightly emphasizes that the two have incommensurable criteria for

declaration that Hippias' reputation (*doxa*) is doubtless an ornament to his native city (364B 1-3). *Doxa* may mean reputation or glory in the eyes of the world, but also mere opinion as opposed to knowledge.

Socrates wants to know whether Hippias thinks Achilles or Odysseus is 'better' (*ἀμείνων*), and in what way (364B 3-5; cf. 363B 5-C 1). The two central heroes of the two greatest epics (363B 4-5) are linked as a pair in the dual number (363B 7, 364C 1; cf. 370D 6-E 4), thus emphasizing their paradigmatic status.<sup>38</sup> Socrates recalls that Eudicus' father, like Hippias,<sup>39</sup> used to call the *Iliad* a 'finer' (*καλλίον*) poem than the *Odyssey* in so far as Achilles is 'better' (*ἀμείνων*) than Odysseus (363B 1-4). This moralizing attitude towards literature reflects the widespread belief that literary characters influence the audience through imitation resulting from emotional identification.<sup>40</sup> And the judgements in question, as the agreement of Hippias with Apemantus suggests, are scarcely idiosyncratic or radical.<sup>41</sup> They are such as would appeal to ordinary Athenians, the 'many' whom Hippias wishes to please with speeches like his 'Trojan discourse'. Hippias' professed expertise in the evaluation of Homeric characters (364C 4), together with his status as a moral teacher<sup>42</sup> and his desire for popular approval, makes him a fitting representative of traditional

success (*HM* xiii, 125; cf. *H. Ma.* 304A-B). But Hippias remains vulnerable to Socratic attack since he is a professional teacher of rational skills (including mathematics) (cf. above, p. 137).

<sup>38</sup> For the history of these two figures see W. B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme* [UT], 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1963); K. C. King, *Achilles: Paradigms of the War Hero from Homer to the Middle Ages* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1987). For their rivalry as paradigms see King, *Achilles*, 69-71; B. M. W. Knox, *The Heroic Temper* [HT] (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1964), 121-2; G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* [BA] (Baltimore, 1979), chs. 2-3, and cf. *Arist. Top.* 117<sup>b</sup>12-25.

<sup>39</sup> This seems to be the force of *καὶ γάρ* (363B 1).

<sup>40</sup> This is the principal basis of the heavily moralizing strand in ancient literary criticism. See Blundell, *HFHE* 12-15.

<sup>41</sup> Achilles was generally acclaimed as the greatest of heroes, whereas Odysseus was viewed with considerable ambivalence (cf. Stanford, *UT*, chs. 7-8).

<sup>42</sup> For the didactic moral purpose of his 'Trojan discourse' cf. *H. Ma.* 286A, with Woodruff, *HM* 89 n. 196. At *Xen. Mem.* 4. 4. 7 Hippias claims to be irrefutable on the subject of justice. In *H. Ma.* he says he can teach Socrates what is fine or noble (*kalos*) (288E) and claims to teach excellence (*aretē*) (283C 3-5, 284A 1-3). The historical Hippias evidently supported nature (*phusis*) over convention (*nomos*) (cf. *Xen. Mem.* 4. 4. 14; see further n. 16 above), but does not seem to have drawn the radical conclusions of a Callicles. His other ethical views seem uncontroversial (as we would expect from one interested in popular approval), nor does Plato attack them *per se* (cf. *Rep.* 493A; Guthrie, *HGP* iii. 284; Irwin, *PMT* 26).

moral standards and their dissemination through the study of Homer.<sup>43</sup>

The implications of Socrates' initial question are reinforced by the mention of Eudicus' father, which, together with the presence of the son, expands the educational issue from a single sophist's views to the role of Homer in the lives of Athenians generally.<sup>44</sup> But Eudicus' education is also important for other reasons. In the *Apology* Socrates includes Hippias among those sophists who can win over the young men of any city to their company (19E–20A). In *Hippias Major* we are told of Eudicus' eagerness to hear Hippias speak (286B), and he probably organized the present performance (above, p. 135). He thus exemplifies the Athenian fascination with the techniques and accomplishments of the sophists.<sup>45</sup> This gives added significance to the question with which he opens the dialogue. He not only asks Socrates' opinion of Hippias' speech, but explicitly locates both question and answer in a philosophical context (363A 1–5; cf. 364B 8–9). Socrates will refer his own enquiry to Eudicus' original question (364B 9), and invite Hippias to teach 'us' (364C 1), thus suggesting that the company as a whole is eager to hear him examine the sophist's claims. He will thus be tackling Hippias' pretensions to wisdom and educational worth in the presence of at least one philosophy student (and perhaps others like him) who admires Hippias, but also wants to see how he will stand up to Socratic scrutiny. Conversely, Socrates' own methods and abilities are on display before an audience of the sophist's admirers. The presence of Eudicus and other intellectually serious bystanders raises the stakes for both Hippias and Socrates, as they compete for the philosophical allegiance of their audience.

Hippias answers Socrates' question with a triad of Homeric characters instead of a pair. His epithets for Achilles and Odysseus are taken directly from Homer: Achilles is 'best' (*aristos*), and Odysseus most 'versatile' (*polutropos*) (364C 4–7).<sup>46</sup> In addition, he introduces

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Xen. *Sym.* 4. 6, where Niceratos claims that his knowledge of Homer enables him to make people 'better' by teaching them to resemble Homeric characters.

<sup>44</sup> On which see Verdenius, 'Homer', 5–19; Blundell, *HFHE* 12 n. 36.

<sup>45</sup> The natural (though not conclusive) inference from Socrates' acquaintance with the father (363B) is that Eudicus is a young man. If so, he may be a 5th-cent. counterpart of Neoptolemus in the 'Trojan discourse'—a young man on the verge of a public career, in need of sound advice. But this must remain speculative, since we know nothing of Eudicus or his father outside these two dialogues.

<sup>46</sup> In the *Iliad* Achilles stands supreme as 'best of the Achaeans' (see Nagy, *BA*, ch. 2). Odysseus is called *polutropos* at *Od.* 1. 1, 10. 330 (though in Homer it probably means merely 'much-travelled', see further n. 56 below).

Nestor as most 'wise' (*sophos*) (364c 6).<sup>47</sup> In Homer Nestor embodies the wisdom of age, and is distinguished for his eloquent and prudent advice.<sup>48</sup> Though lacking the cultural pre-eminence of the other two, he remained one of the most influential figures of legend, becoming a paradigm of eloquence, self-restraint, and sage advice to the young, especially young rulers.<sup>49</sup> His inclusion here makes good sense, on the assumption that Hippias' display speech was indeed his 'Trojan discourse' (above, p. 135). His putative role in that speech, as adviser the young Neoptolemus, would suit his introduction here as 'wisest'. The epithet also makes him a potential ancestor and paradigm for the *sophia* ('wisdom') of Hippias himself. Nestor prefigures not only the sophists' faith in eloquent (and verbose) persuasion, but their role as educators, especially for political life. By delivering his moralizing through the mouth of the 'most wise' Nestor, Hippias takes Nestor's mantle on to his own shoulders.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, since Hippias is supposed to be providing distinguishing features of each hero (364c 2), this characterization of Nestor serves to pre-empt Odysseus' claim to wisdom. Odysseus traditionally shares Nestor's eloquence and self-restraint,<sup>51</sup> but lacks his role as prudent adviser to the young. His characteristic 'wisdom' is the versatile shrewdness captured in the epithet *polutropos*.<sup>52</sup> The use of *sophos* for Nestor, by denying such versatility (*polutropia*) the name of wisdom, leaves open the ultimate value of this kind of cleverness.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>47</sup> *Sophos* is not found in Homer, and *sophia* ('wisdom') appears only once, in connection with carpentry (*Il.* 15. 412). But *sophia* was associated with Nestor in later times (cf. *Soph. Phil.* 421-3).

<sup>48</sup> e.g. *Il.* 1. 247-84, 2. 336-68, 9. 52-78, 92-113, 11. 655-803, 23. 304-48.

<sup>49</sup> See H. North, *From Myth to Icon* [MI] (Ithaca, 1979), 38, 46, 116, 136. For Nestor's oratorical reputation cf. *Phaedrus* 261B-C (with W. H. Thompson (ed.), *The Phaedrus of Plato* [London, 1868], ad loc.); G. Kennedy, 'The Ancient Dispute over Rhetoric in Homer' ['ADRH'], *American Journal of Philology*, 78 (1957), 26-8; K. J. Dover (ed.), *Plato: Symposium* (Cambridge, 1980), on 221c 3. He is one of Niceratos' Homeric models at *Xen. Sym.* 4. 6; cf. also *Ion* 537A-B, *Arist. Top.* 117<sup>b</sup>25.

<sup>50</sup> Plato makes Protagoras trace the art of the sophist back to early figures of wisdom, including Homer (*Prot.* 316D-E; cf. also 341A). Craftsmen sometimes traced their lineage to a legendary forebear: doctors to Asclepius (*Sym.* 186E with Dover ad loc.), the Homeridae (a group of rhapsodes) to Homer (see *RE*, s.v., and cf. *Ion* 530D), and perhaps sculptors to Daedalus (*Euthph.* 11B, *Alc.* 1 121A, with Guthrie, *HGP* iii. 378-9); cf. also *Ar. Frogs* 1032-6. For the practice of comparing real people to legendary characters cf. *Sym.* 221C, *Phaedrus* 261C, *Prot.* 316C8, *Arist. Post. An.* 97<sup>b</sup>17-21.

<sup>51</sup> For his self-restraint see North, *MI* 40-1, 74-80. For his rhetorical skill see n. 94 below. For his resemblance to Nestor cf. *Od.* 3. 126-9, *Arist. Top.* 117<sup>b</sup>25.

<sup>52</sup> Antisthenes defended Odysseus' *polutropia* as an aspect of his *sophia* (fr. 51 Caizzi).

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Hoerber, 'LHP' 125 n. 2; P. Friedländer, *Plato*, ii, Eng. trans. (New York, 1964), 138. *Sophos* can mean 'clever' or 'crafty' in a morally neutral or even pejorative sense (cf.

Hippias seems to rely unthinkingly on the Iliadic values that underpin Achilles' unquestioned claim to be *aristos*: though different people may be 'best' in different respects, it is the greatest warrior who deserves the unadorned epithet *aristos*, and *a fortiori* embodies the answer to the question 'who is better?'<sup>54</sup> The inferiority of Odysseus will be a matter for contention. Meanwhile the complicating presence of Nestor suggests a criterion of excellence not encompassed by the figure of Achilles, whose supreme excellence in battle was not matched by equal skill in counsel (*Il.* 18. 105–6). To a sophist or philosopher *sophia* must be of paramount importance. Hippias should be alert to this, for he has just described himself as unsurpassed in his own sphere (364A 8–9), and will turn out to be 'wisest' and 'best' at the subjects he professes (366D 2–5). Moreover, in *Hippias Major* he claims that his *sophia* can make people 'better with regard to excellence (*aretē*)' (283C 3–5; cf. 284A 1–3). He should therefore be wary of parroting the simple Homeric formula that makes Achilles 'best'. It is not merely inadequate to deal with the various excellences of the heroes he mentions, but threatens the underlying assumptions of his whole way of life. Later Socrates will tell us that he asked his initial question in the belief that there was little to choose between Achilles and Odysseus in regard to honesty or 'the rest of *aretē*' (370D 6–E 4). By collapsing the distinction between two traditionally different types of excellence—the honest warrior and the devious trickster—Socrates lets us know that he has been operating from the outset with a different notion of excellence, one that can encompass both these contrary paradigms and hold them to the same standard.

Socrates responds to Hippias' banal characterization of the three heroes—which he claims not to understand—with an exclamation of amazement (364C 8–D 1).<sup>55</sup> Beneath the irony lies a suggestion that the conventionally obvious may be open to question. Socrates' immediate problem is not with the characterizations of Achilles and Nestor, which he 'thinks' he understands (364D 7–E 1), but with

e.g. *Rep.* 365C 5, and see M. W. Blundell, 'The Moral Character of Odysseus in the *Philoctetes*' ['MCO'], *Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies*, 28 [1987], 326), but Hippias uses it only with approval.

<sup>54</sup> We therefore need not assume that *polutropos* is pejorative at its first appearance (pace R. Weiss, 'Ο Ἀγαθός as ὁ Δυνατός in the *Hippias Minor*' ['Ο Ἀγαθός'], *CQ* 31 [1981], 291).

<sup>55</sup> Cf. his reaction to an equally banal statement by Hippias at *H. Ma.* 291D–E. For Hippias' banality in that dialogue see Tarrant, *HM* xxx.

Odysseus and the epithet *polutropos* (364E 1-4). This word is, appropriately enough, a flexible one, meaning literally 'of many turns', and ranging from 'much-travelled' to 'versatile', 'complex', 'shifty' and 'unreliable'.<sup>56</sup> Socrates asks whether Homer does not portray Achilles as *polutropos* (364E 5-6).<sup>57</sup> A case could be made for applying this epithet to Achilles, with his violent shifts of emotion and hence of language and behaviour.<sup>58</sup> In traditional terms, however, the question is absurd, for *polutropos* was firmly associated with the notoriously devious Odysseus, in contrast to the blunt honesty of Achilles.<sup>59</sup> Hippias brings out this traditional feature of the Achillean paradigm by quoting Achilles' words to Odysseus at *Il.* 9. 308-13 (365A 1-B 2).<sup>60</sup> This passage may have been a commonplace for contrasting the two characters.<sup>61</sup> According to Hippias, it shows not only that Achilles is 'truthful and simple', but that Odysseus is '*polutropos* and false (*pseudēs*)' (365B 3-6).<sup>62</sup> *Pseudēs* need not mean 'lying' or 'deceitful', since it can be used for accidental, unknowing, or fictitious falsehoods, with no necessary implications about intention.<sup>63</sup> But it is clear from the Homeric quotation that Hippias does mean to characterize Odysseus as a liar. And as Socrates proceeds to make explicit (365B

<sup>56</sup> See LSJ, s.v., and for the application to Odysseus see Stanford, *UT* 99. As J. H. Finley notes, the associations with travel and versatility are linked (*Homer's Odyssey* [HO] [Cambridge, Mass., 1978], 30). For the thematic significance of *polutropos* in this dialogue cf. Hoerber, *LH* 131.

<sup>57</sup> J. J. Mulhern thinks Socrates' problem is that *polutropos* designates not a distinctive kind of behaviour (*tropos*), but merely a capacity (*dunamis*) ('*Tropos* and *Polytropia* in Plato's *Hippias Minor*' ['TP'], *Phoenix*, 22 [1968], 283). But he pays too much attention to the word's etymology and too little to its established connotations.

<sup>58</sup> And has been, by R. Schmiel, 'Wily Achilles', *Classical Outlook*, 61 (1983-4), 41-3.

<sup>59</sup> It is also an epithet of Hermes, the trickster god (*HH Hermes* 13, 439).

<sup>60</sup> Hippias omits 311 and slightly alters 310 and 314. J. Labarbe thinks these variations reflect a 4th-cent. text of Homer (*L'Homère de Platon* [HP] [Liège, 1949], 51-2), but they are better explained as adaptations (conscious or otherwise) to Plato's context. J. Phillips claims that they misrepresent the intention of the Homeric Achilles ('Plato's Use of Homer in the *Hippias Minor*' ['PUH'], *Favonius*, 1 [1987], 23), but cf. Stanford, *UT* 18. T. Brennan suggests that they show the weakness of Hippias' memory ('Plato's *Lesser Hippias*: A Translation and Critical Discussion' [BA thesis; Reed College, 1987], 24-5; cf. also Phillips, 'PUH' 24), but cf. Labarbe, *HP* 51-2. More attractive is Brennan's suggestion that they serve to lay greater stress on intentional action.

<sup>61</sup> It is quoted by scholiasts on *Od.* 1. 1 (= Antisth. fr. 51 Caizzi) and *Soph. Phil.* 94. But the former may not be independent of *H. Min.* (see Pohlenz, *PW* 57-9; F. D. Caizzi, *Antisthenis Fragmenta* [Milan, 1966], ad loc.).

<sup>62</sup> *Polutropos* is not used in the Homeric passage, but *polumēkhanos* 'much-contriving' (365A 1) has a similar force (cf. Finley, *HO* 34-5).

<sup>63</sup> This is rightly emphasized by G. Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Cambridge, 1991), supporting essay for ch. 5.

7-C 1), he is using *polutropos* the same way, in accordance with one of its well-established connotations.<sup>64</sup>

So according to Homer, says Socrates, the truth-teller and the *pseudēs* are different (365 C 3-4). He is careful to obtain Hippias' agreement to this apparent truism (365 C 6; cf. 366 A 5-6).<sup>65</sup> As Hippias, spokesman of the obvious, declares, it would be bizarre (*deinos*) to think otherwise (365 C 7). He and Homer, from whom the view is derived, stand side by side as representatives of ordinary common-sense opinion. At this point, however, Homer is temporarily abandoned, since, as Socrates says, we cannot ask him what he had in mind when composing these lines (365 C 8-D 1).<sup>66</sup> This is a tacit criticism of the naïve view of literature exemplified by Hippias' use of Homer, whereby the author's own opinions are directly inferred from the words of his characters. It also reflects Plato's characteristic distrust of the verbal transmission of ideas in the absence of their author to explain and justify them.<sup>67</sup> None of us can speak for another, but only for ourselves. Yet Hippias must continue to answer on Homer's behalf as well as his own, since he has taken on this responsibility and agrees with what he claims are Homer's views (365 D 2-4). Thus although Hippias cannot serve as a real mouthpiece for the real Homer (for that is impossible), he does represent Homer as Hippias, Homerist, moralist, and educator, understands him. By going to battle for his Homer, Hippias is defending the whole practice of Homeric interpretation and the educational and cultural milieu in which it flourishes. He has learnt the lessons of Homeric education so well that he and Homer (as a cultural institution) will stand or fall together.

<sup>64</sup> Pace Mulhern, 'TP' 284-5, he does not shift from a *dunamis* word (*polutropos*) to a *tropos* word (*pseudēs*) (for the terminology see n. 57 above). On the ambiguities in the subsequent argument see also Guthrie, *HGP* iv. 195-6; R. K. Sprague, *Plato's Use of Fallacy* [PUF] (London, 1962), 67-71; J. Zembaty, 'Socrates' Perplexity in Plato's *Hippias Minor*' ['SPPHM'], in J. P. Anton and A. Preus (eds.), *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, iii (New York, 1989), 58-61.

<sup>65</sup> The point must be clearly established because it is the refutandum of the subsequent elenchus (*pace* Weiss, 'O 'Αγαθός', 293, who overlooks the tone of Hippias' response).

<sup>66</sup> For the difficulty of ascertaining Homer's underlying meaning cf. *Ion*. 530 C 4, *Rep.* 378 D 3-E 1, *Xen. Sym.* 3. 6.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. *Meno* 71 D, *Prot.* 347 B-348 A, *Phaedrus* 275 D-E, *Theaet.* 171 D.

## III

The stage is now set for the first elenchus, in which Socrates 'proves' that, contrary to the opinion of Hippias and Homer, the *alēthēs* or truth-teller is in fact the same as the *pseudēs* or false-speaker. He begins by winning Hippias' agreement to the proposition that the *pseudēs* is someone 'capable' (*dunatos*) (365 D 6–8). This exploits not only the fact that *pseudēs* may express habitual activity, and hence a capacity,<sup>68</sup> but the association of lying with manipulation and pragmatic success—associations particularly appropriate to Odysseus. These connotations are evoked by Socrates' association of *pseudēs* with the words *polutropos* and *panourgia* ('unscrupulousness' or 'villainy'), both of which have Odyssean overtones (365 E 2–4).<sup>69</sup> Hippias agrees that deception and versatility arise not from foolishness and ignorance but from 'some kind of *panourgia* and wisdom (*phronēsis*)', and hence that deceivers know what they are doing (365 E 2–8). The *pseudēs* hence turns out to be *sophos* in his own sphere of lying (365 E 10–11; cf. 366 A 4, 366 A 7, 366 B 1, 366 B 4–5). But since the expert in any field of knowledge is the one best able to speak both truth and falsehood (366 C 5–367 C 6, 367 D 6–369 A 2), the *pseudēs* and the truth-teller turn out, contrary to Hippias' original common-sense view, to be the same (367 C 7–D 2, 369 B 2–3). Hence both Achilles and Odysseus are simultaneously 'liars' and truth-tellers, and thus not opposites, but the same (369 B 4–7).

At least since Aristotle this argument has been justly criticized as fallacious, especially for its equivocation on *pseudēs* as a capacity and as a disposition which gives rise to intentional action (*Metaph.* 1025<sup>a</sup>6–13). It can be defended only at the price of neglecting the ambiguity of *pseudēs*, and treating it as denoting simply a capacity.<sup>70</sup> But this is to ignore the argument's context. The question at issue is one of character, so we would naturally expect the epithets to refer to purposeful behaviour or disposition, rather than mere capacity. This

<sup>68</sup> He is not shifting back from a *tropos* (disposition) to a *dunamis* (capacity) (Mulhern, 'TP' 285), but bringing out the fact that the disposition includes and presupposes the capacity.

<sup>69</sup> For the meaning of *panourgia* and its association with Odysseus see Blundell, 'MCO' 315–16. Cf. also Pohlenz, *PW* 71.

<sup>70</sup> See Weiss, 'O *Ἀγαθός*', 288–94, and cf. G. X. Santas, *Socrates: Philosophy in Plato's Early Dialogues* (London, 1979), 148–50. For criticism of Weiss see Waterfield, *HM* 277; Zembaty, 'SPPHM' 52–8.



is confirmed by the initial language of both participants. Hippias says Homer often portrays Odysseus as being 'of such a kind' (τοιοῦτον) (365C 1-2), and Socrates' word ἀπατεῶνες ('deceptive') cannot be restricted to mere capacity (365E 3). Hippias even touches on the moral significance of intention with his casual observation that liars' knowledge is what makes them reprehensible (365E 8-9). Yet he accepts Socrates' move from 'the *pseudeis* are among the capable and wise' (366A 6-8), to 'the *pseudeis* are those wise and capable of falsehood' (366B 4-5). Once *pseudēs* has been defined like this in terms of pure capacity, the argument is technically valid.<sup>71</sup> but only at the price of 'a brazen departure from common usage' which neglects the original terms of the discussion.<sup>72</sup>

It is impossible to be certain whether Plato meant to represent Socrates as unaware of this equivocation.<sup>73</sup> We cannot assume that a fallacy so obvious to us or even Aristotle was equally apparent to Socrates or Plato. But the peculiarity of Socrates' definition of *pseudēs* indicates that he is at least conscious of the ambiguity which underlies the fallacy—unless we are to suppose him unaware of ordinary usage. Since the argument is most emphatically derived from Hippias,<sup>74</sup> Socrates himself is not committed to its truth or validity. Moreover, the 'literary criticism' in the next part of the dialogue will indirectly reveal the flaw in this first argument. Socrates' absurd claim, satirically exaggerated in tone, that Achilles outdoes Odysseus as a purposeful liar and cheat (371A), strongly suggests an understanding of the importance of intention, and even succeeds in prompting such an understanding in Hippias.<sup>75</sup>

We need not assume, then, that Socrates himself is hoodwinked by the argument he extracts from his interlocutor. It is an *ad hominem* argument whose crudeness displays Hippias' obtuseness, in ignominious

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Zembaty, 'SPPHM' 55, though she places the pivotal moment at 366A 2.

<sup>72</sup> Vlastos, *Socrates*, supporting essay for ch. 5.

<sup>73</sup> The view that both Socrates and Plato were unaware of the fallacy has been held e.g. by G. Grote, *Plato and the Other Companions of Sokrates*, 2nd edn. (London, 1888), ii. 67; Vlastos, *Socrates*, supporting essay for ch. 5. Sprague, *PUF*, ch. 4, argues for conscious equivocation.

<sup>74</sup> This is a standard feature of Socrates' elenctic method, but receives exceptional emphasis here. The phrase κατὰ τὸν σὸν λόγον ('in accordance with your argument') occurs four times, three of them in connection with this argument (365E 1, 366A 8, 370A 2; cf. 373B 7). Cf. also 365C 6, 366A 2-B 3, 367B 2-3, 367B 4, 368E 3, 369A 2.

<sup>75</sup> See further below, pp. 154-5. I differ here from Vlastos, who thinks that the passage shows precisely the opposite, namely Socrates' failure to distinguish the various senses of *pseudēs* (pers. comm.).

contrast to his initial pretensions. This does not mean, however, that Socrates intends to win a cheap dialectical victory through deceit. He does, to be sure, allow Hippias to fall into the trap. He does so, however, not in order to mislead or deceive, but to prompt in Hippias the *aporia* which is the first step towards better understanding. Even Hippias sees that there is something wrong with the argument (369B 7–C 5). The absurdity of its conclusion is a challenge to him, to the audience of bystanders, and ultimately to ourselves, to try and disentangle it.<sup>76</sup>

The integral relationship between character and argument emerges from one particularly striking feature of this elenchus. That is the way Socrates uses Hippias himself as the source of all his examples,<sup>77</sup> thus offering him ample opportunity to raise questions concerning the behaviour and disposition of the *pseudēs*. Since Hippias is experienced in arithmetic, he is 'most capable, wise, and excellent' at it, and hence most capable of lying about it at will; it follows that the *pseudēs* and the truth-teller are the same (366C 5–367D 2). The same conclusion is drawn from his abilities in geometry and astronomy (367D 6–368A 7). The argument is then extended to all branches of knowledge (368A 8–9), and Socrates proceeds to report Hippias' own boast that he is 'most *sophos* of all people in the greatest number of skills' (368B 2–3).

According to his own self-estimation, then, Hippias is uniquely qualified to confirm Socrates' argument from the standpoint of his extraordinarily extensive knowledge. Since he accepts without question that to be *pseudēs* is reprehensible, we may assume that he would not claim this epithet for himself.<sup>78</sup> Yet he fails to identify the flaw in the argument, despite the fact that he himself is Socrates' prime exhibit—and perhaps in part because of it. He has achieved success of a kind that glorifies the use of morally neutral capacities for personal ends.<sup>79</sup> As Socrates puts it, the capable man (*dunatos*) is one who 'does what he wants when he wants to' (366B 7–C 1). In *Hippias Major* Hippias views capacity or power (*dunamis*), especially in the political arena, as something 'fine' (*kalos*), and values 'wisdom' for

<sup>76</sup> On the pedagogical function of Socratic irony see below, p. 170.

<sup>77</sup> The significance of this has been little explored, but cf. Pohlenz, *PW* 66–7; Phillips, 'PUH', 29–30.

<sup>78</sup> See n. 162 below, and cf. *Xen. Mem.* 4. 4. 7. Hippias never entertains the possibility of justifiable falsehood (e.g. for pedagogical or diplomatic purposes).

<sup>79</sup> Like other sophists, he values rhetoric for the ability it provides to win personal success by defeating anyone (*H. Ma.* 304A–B). For the moral neutrality of the rhetorical *dunamis* cf. esp. *Gorg.* 456C–457C.

similar reasons (295 E–296 A). His inability to distinguish capacity from disposition in *Hippias Minor* is an indictment of this preoccupation with the ability to achieve one's goals rather than the state of character which defines those goals. His philosophical inadequacy is displayed not just by his dialectical failure but by the *kind* of mistake that he makes, and the attitude towards 'wisdom' that this reveals. The argument itself is structured in such a way as to highlight this inadequacy.

Plato chooses this strategic moment to make Socrates expatiate on Hippias' impressively versatile polymathy, which so far has only been hinted at (363 C 1–3, 364 A 9).<sup>80</sup> The erstwhile verbose and self-confident sophist, with his professional stake in intellectual consistency, has been reduced to inconsistency and confusion, as his brief, insubstantial answers reflect. Now it is Socrates' turn to make a long (for him) speech,<sup>81</sup> which underscores by its place in the argument the sophist's dialectical inadequacy and the paltriness of his claims to wisdom. In listing Hippias' accomplishments Socrates begins with practical skills. He recounts the sophist's boast that he once came to Olympia with 'everything concerning the body'—jewellery, shoes, clothing, oil-bottle, and scraper—all of his own workmanship (368 B 5–C 7). Hippias is concerned with the body as well as the soul, but only in a superficially glamorous way.<sup>82</sup> He focuses on external trappings rather than physical health and vigour, just as he prefers rhetoric and the commonplaces of popular morality to the strenuous intellectual exercise of dialectic. The list of items reaches its climax with the Persian belt which he wore himself, and which everyone agreed was 'most extraordinary' and evidence of 'the greatest *sophia*' (368 C 4–7). Plato could not make it clearer that the ambivalent word *sophia*, which can be used for such an ingenious but trivial and

<sup>80</sup> See further *H. Ma.* 285 C–E and n. 16 above.

<sup>81</sup> For Socrates' dislike of lengthy speeches cf. 373 A 2–3, *Prot.* 334 C–338 A, *Gorg.* 447 B–C, 449 B–C, 461 D–462 A. Tarrant, *HM* xxxi, cites Socrates' long speeches in *H. Min.* as evidence of inauthenticity. But this first speech is anecdotal rather than argumentative, and reflects Hippias' own verbosity (which it reports). The second (369 D–370 E) is a response to Hippias' request for a speech (cf. Calogero, *IM* 26–7). The third (372 B–373 A) is again not argumentative, but aporetic and methodological. Note that all three are about the same length, and all arise from Hippias' refusal to accept a paradoxical conclusion.

<sup>82</sup> For the contrast between soul and body cf. 364 A 1–6, 372 E 6–373 A 2. Grote noted the significance of Hippias' showy costume as an indicator of character, matched by 'the silliness and presumption of his talk' (*Plato*, ii. 55).

even decadent item, fit only for the admiration of the many, is no guarantee of philosophical wisdom.<sup>83</sup>

Socrates adds to his catalogue Hippias' literary compositions (368c 8–D 2) and 'the subjects I mentioned earlier' (namely arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy) (368D 2–3), to which he now adds 'rhythm, intonation, orthography, and very many other things besides' (368D 4–5, trans. Waterfield). These subjects are trivialized by their position in the speech, which puts them on a par with the practical and decorative crafts with which Socrates began. The list is then capped with the ironic mention (Socrates 'almost forgot' it) of Hippias' mnemonic technique (368D 6–7). This was no doubt useful for memorizing Homer, as well as the rest of Hippias' vast store of knowledge, and Hippias is especially proud of it (368D 7).<sup>84</sup> But as Socrates' subsequent irony implies, mechanical memorization is valueless for dialectic: when Hippias fails to recall the implications of the argument, Socrates remarks that he must not be using his method—perhaps he thinks it unnecessary?—so he, Socrates (a living interlocutor rather than a mechanical technique), will prod the sophist's memory (369A 4–8).<sup>85</sup>

Socrates concludes his speech by inviting Hippias to generalize over this whole diverse group of skills, and other people's as well, and indeed any kind of *sophia* or unscrupulousness (*panourgia*), and conclude that in every case the *pseudēs* and the truth-teller are the same (368E 1–369A 2). The catalogue of skills establishes a painful contrast between Hippias' pretensions and the conclusion to which Socrates has driven him, a conclusion which not only contradicts his previously stated view but clearly violates common sense (as Hippias' rather tentative agreement indicates, 369A 3). Socrates' strategically located speech makes clear that it is the quality of Hippias' mind and

<sup>83</sup> On the ambivalence of *sophia* cf. n. 53 above. Hippias' crafts so far are banalistic, womanly, or barbarian, and as such would be despised by many Greeks, especially aristocratic males. Cic. *De orat.* 3. 32 contrasts Hippias' practical skills with his 'liberales doctrinae atque ingenuae' ('learning befitting a free-born gentleman'). Cf. also *H. Ma.* 291A with Woodruff ad loc.

<sup>84</sup> At *H. Ma.* 285E Hippias says he can memorize fifty names at one hearing. Xenophon tells us that he also taught the skill to others (*Sym.* 4. 62). Oral poets and rhapsodes must have needed some such technique (especially for e.g. *Il.* 2. 494–877, 18. 39–49). Simonides was said to have invented the art of mnemonics, but his methods were probably derived from the oral poetic tradition (F. A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* [AM] [London, 1966], 1–2, 29).

<sup>85</sup> For the irony cf. *Ion.* 539E. For the uselessness of memorizing Homer cf. *Xen. Sym.* 3. 6, *Mem.* 4. 2. 10.

character, as displayed in his diffuse and vulgar interests and his concern for public admiration, which impedes his ability to understand and criticize the argument.

Hippias' accomplishments include various literary compositions—both epic, tragic, and dithyrambic poetry, and 'many prose speeches of different kinds' (368C 8–D 2; cf. 363C 1–3).<sup>86</sup> These are listed with his other home-made items, right after the Persian belt, so as to assimilate Hippias' literary works to his clothing and other artefacts. Following in the epic tradition of poetry as craftsmanship, Socrates places the poet's and speech-writer's arts on the same level as the cobbler's. This effect is reinforced by the literal (and not uncommon) meaning of *poiē-mata* ('poetry') (368C 8) as 'things made' (cf. *Sym.* 205B–C). In addition Hippias' role as a poet, in particular of epic, recalls his special relationship to Homer, another poetical 'maker'.<sup>87</sup> When the sophist is forced into inconsistency he is refuted on Homer's behalf as well as his own (cf. 365C 3–D 4). The student of Homer has learnt his master's craft, both his encyclopaedic knowledge<sup>88</sup> and his ability to delight an audience with pleasurable 'falsehoods' (cf. *H. Ma.* 285D–286A),<sup>89</sup> but he has acquired neither rational consistency nor dialectical insight.<sup>90</sup> His inability to criticize the argument, and the state of contradiction to which it reduces him, show the failure of his Homeric training and his multifarious 'wisdom' to equip him for Socratic dialectic. But only dialectic can yield the genuine ethical understanding to which he fondly thinks his Homeric studies give him professional access.

Socrates' speech also suggests that Hippias has been moulded by his Homeric studies in a different fashion. One of the principal ways in which poets 'teach' is by providing literary characters as moral exemplars. As a student of Homer, Hippias should therefore take on the character not of Homer himself, but of his creatures. Hippias, who

<sup>86</sup> For his only extant verses see Tarrant, *HM* xxiv.

<sup>87</sup> The verb 'make' (*ποιέω*) is used repeatedly of Homer (e.g. 364C 5, 364D 8, 364E 2, 365C 1, 369C 4, 370E 1, 371A 4).

<sup>88</sup> Compare 368B 2–3 with Xen. *Sym.* 4. 6–7, where Homer is called 'most *sophos*' and said to cover 'almost all human affairs'. For the wide range of skills 'taught' by Homer cf. *Ion* 536E–541B, *Rep.* 606E, and see further Verdenius, 'Homer', 15–16; King, *Achilles*, 78–9; E. A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), ch. 4. For Plato's hostility to this view see esp. *Rep.* 598D–600B, *Laws* 810E–811B.

<sup>89</sup> On fiction as 'falsehood' see M. Heath, *The Poetics of Greek Tragedy* (London, 1987), 39–40. For Plato's view of poetry and oratory as 'flattery' see esp. *Gorg.* 501D–502E. For the sophist as an 'imitator' who can 'bewitch' (*γοητεύειν*) the young see *Soph.* 233D–235A.

<sup>90</sup> Ion, another Homerist, shares the same alleged skills and deficiencies.

is so proud of his *sophia*, originally proposed Nestor as most *sophos* of Homer's characters (364C 6). And Achilles is the one he admires most. But his own versatility aligns him with Odysseus. Moreover, even supposing that he could acquire the salient traits of three such different characters (an inherently doubtful proposition), he would in so doing revert to just one: Odysseus *polutropos*.<sup>91</sup>

Hippias resembles Homer's Odysseus as the versatile man of all trades, always pursuing novelty,<sup>92</sup> and eager for practical gain.<sup>93</sup> Like Hippias, Odysseus is a master of persuasive language (whether fact or fiction),<sup>94</sup> with which he successfully delights his audience,<sup>95</sup> and also of practical skills, such as the construction of his own craft (*Od.* 5. 228–61). Further, by building his argument on Hippias' own skills, Socrates has shown that Hippias has the same capacity to lie that was originally ascribed to Odysseus. Both are the bearers of a morally ambivalent 'wisdom', which may be used for lies and villainy (*panourgia*) as well as truth (368E 5; cf. 365E 4–5). Odysseus chooses to employ his capacity for falsehood, whereas Hippias evidently does not. Yet the sophist remains unable to pinpoint the fallacy in the argument which 'proves' that he above all other people—in his own view (368B 2–3)—is *pseudēs*. The confusion of capacity with disposition—the fundamental fallacy in this first argument—thus serves to conflate Hippias with the figure of Odysseus. His failure to identify the fallacy prevents him from distancing himself from Odysseus and disowning this disreputable brand of *sophia*. At the same time it discredits the philosophical value of his Odyssean 'wisdom'.

#### IV

The dialogue is punctuated by an outbreak of resentment from Hippias, which provides the first sign that his equanimity has been

<sup>91</sup> By the same token, Homer's role as poet makes him *polutropos* as well as *pseudēs*, and Odysseus' skill at story-telling is an aspect of his *polutropia*.

<sup>92</sup> For this quality in Odysseus see Stanford, *UT* 75–6. At Xen. *Mem.* 4. 4. 7 Hippias says he always tries to say something novel (*καίνον*).

<sup>93</sup> For Odysseus' interest in profit cf. Stanford, *UT* 76; Finley, *HO* 32–3. For Hippias see n. 25 above.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. *Il.* 3. 216–24, *Phaedrus* 261B–C, Xen. *Mem.* 4. 6. 15, and see Stanford, *UT* 71–2; Finley, *HO* 33–4; Kennedy, 'ADRH' 26–8. His narrative of his adventures gives him the role of epic poet, and twice he is likened to a skilful bard (11. 368, 17. 518–21).

<sup>95</sup> Cf. *Od.* 11. 333–4, 13. 1–2, 17. 514–21, 19. 203–4.

ruffled,<sup>96</sup> and leads into a brief methodological excursus. Though unable to find specific fault with the argument, the sophist evidently feels something is wrong. He withholds assent to the final paradox, protesting at the way Socrates habitually 'weaves' his arguments (369B 8–C 2).<sup>97</sup> Having been worsted by question and answer he wants to revert to a more congenial method. In an agonistic spirit appropriate to one nurtured on the Homeric epic (369C 1; cf. 364A 7–9), he proposes a formal rhetorical debate (369C 2–8).<sup>98</sup> Ignoring the claim that Odysseus and Achilles are 'the same', he takes Socrates to be defending the superiority of the former, then transposes the question of which character is 'better' into the question of who can speak 'better' in the eyes of the audience, Hippias or Socrates (369C 6–8). Socrates counters by declining to contest Hippias' superior 'wisdom' (whose character has by now become clear), and defending his own methods in terms that recall the *Apology*: Hippias is one of the seeming *sophoi* from whom he is eager to learn and benefit (369D 1–E 2; cf. *Ap.* 21B–E, 23B).<sup>99</sup> We are thus reminded both of the recently discomfited Hippias' claims as a teacher and of the two men's contrasting goals. Socrates' skill at 'weaving words' is directed towards the pursuit of true wisdom, whereas Hippias uses his manifold skills merely to win the applause of his audience.

Yet Socrates does not disappoint Hippias in his request for a more substantial speech. Adopting the sophist's own manner, he proceeds to quote Homer in defence of the paradoxical conclusion that both Achilles and Odysseus are both liars and truth-tellers, and hence the same (369B 3–7).<sup>100</sup> As he rightly observes, the passage cited by Hippias is by itself poor evidence for Odysseus' duplicity (369E 2–370A 1), for we need not automatically accept one character's judgement of another. Achilles himself, on the other hand, contradicts

<sup>96</sup> Except for a touch of impatience prior to the argument proper (365D 5).

<sup>97</sup> For similar complaints cf. e.g. *H. Ma.* 301B, 304A, *Gorg.* 483A, 497B, *Rep.* 338D, 341A, 487B. Weaving is a common metaphor both for poetic composition and for the devising of plans, especially crafty schemes to trap or ensnare (cf. *Od.* 3. 212). Here it recalls the weaving of Hippias' Persian belt (368C 7), and is thus suggestive of two contrasting spheres of cleverness.

<sup>98</sup> On this sophistic practice see Guthrie, *HGP* iii. 43; Kerferd, *SM* 29; Waterfield, *HM* 275. For Hippias' penchant for set speeches see Tarrant, *HM* xxii–xxiii. For his agonistic spirit cf. also *Prot.* 337C–338E; Guthrie, *HGP* iv. 193 n. 1.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. also e.g. *H. Min.* 372B–C, *H. Ma.* 286D, 304C, *Euthph.* 5A–B.

<sup>100</sup> Given the paradoxical nature of this conclusion, and Hippias' recalcitrance, it is natural for Socrates to go on to show how it applies to the two original heroes (*pace* Weiss, 'O *Ἀγαθός*', 294).

himself more than once (370A 1–371C 5). Since he was surely too nobly born and well educated to do this inadvertently, Socrates concludes that Achilles outdoes even Odysseus as a charlatan (γόης) (371A 2–B 1, 371C 6–D 7).<sup>101</sup> This farcical treatment of Homer, which blithely ignores the bulk of the poetic evidence (cf. 365C 1–2, 369C 3–5), displays Socrates' adeptness at the sophistic practice of selective quotation from the poets for literary-critical and educational purposes.<sup>102</sup> But this does not make the passage merely an amusing bagatelle in which Socrates beats Hippias at his own game. If the game is the interpretation of Homer, he beats him at a rather different one, for the sophist's readings of Homer are much the more plausible.<sup>103</sup> By reducing Hippias' method to absurdity Socrates shows the intellectual limitations of a method whose highly successful practitioner is so easily trapped and confused by dialectic. Moreover, despite the superficial absurdity of Socrates' conclusions, they have serious implications.<sup>104</sup> He will address without frivolity the suggestion arising out of this argument, that the purposeful wrongdoer, exemplified by Odysseus, is superior to the inadvertent one, represented here by Achilles.

Socrates' foray into literary criticism returns him, he says, to the bewilderment in which he posed his original question (370D 6–7). He accordingly signals a fresh start, by reintroducing Achilles and Odysseus in the dual number as two competing ethical models (370D 6–E 4). Hippias too reverts to his original demeanour, having apparently regained his composure.<sup>105</sup> He is confident that Socrates is wrong, and provides the common-sense solution to his difficulty: Odysseus and Achilles are to be distinguished by their intentions (370E 5–9, 371D 8–E 3). Achilles speaks a 'falsehood' in Socrates' first

<sup>101</sup> Plato uses γόης (literally 'magician') (371A 3) for liars and charlatans, and especially associates it with sophists (P. Louis, *Les Métaphores de Platon* [Paris, 1945], 73–4; cf. n. 89 above).

<sup>102</sup> Hippias' anthology of poetry and prose (88 B 4, 6 DK) was presumably assembled for such purposes.

<sup>103</sup> Stokes argues that literary plausibility is not a criterion for the sophists interpreting Simonides in *Prot.* (PSC 321). But despite Hippias' praise there for Socrates' sophistic handling of Simonides (*Prot.* 347A), his interpretations of Homer in *H. Min.* are perfectly plausible. In the realm of literary criticism, he plays a straightforward 'Achilles' to Socrates' 'Odysseus' (see further below, pp. 166–70).

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Irwin, 'STH' 57; Stokes, PSC 313–23 (on *Prot.* 338E–347A). That this kind of manipulation of literature is not intrinsically frivolous should be clear from the treatment of Homer in the *Republic*, where the misinterpretation of Achilles and his motives differs only in degree from that in *H. Min.* (compare 371C 6–D 2 with *Rep.* 391C).

<sup>105</sup> This ability to retain his self-confidence is one of his salient features in *H. Ma.* (cf. 291B, 295A, 297E, 300C, 301D).



example because he is 'forced' by the army's plight to stay and help (370E 5-8), and in the other case because he is 'persuaded by good will' (371E 1).<sup>106</sup> Such self-contradictions, Hippias implies, do not indicate a lying (and so reprehensible) disposition, if they arise inadvertently from commendable motives, rather than from deliberate calculation. The same view is suggested by Socrates' ironic characterization of Achilles as 'nobly scorning truth-telling' (370D 5-6).<sup>107</sup> A further clue may be glimpsed in his mischievous claim that someone educated, like Achilles, by a 'most wise' teacher (371D 1) will not be forgetful (371C 6). The implausible suggestion that a well-trained memory is sufficient for consistent truth-telling recalls not only Socrates' mockery of Hippias' mnemonics (368D) but the first elenchus, with its conspicuous neglect of disposition, motive, and intention. Hippias' failure to grasp the significance of such factors prevented him from pinpointing the fallacy. But faced with the absurdity of Socrates' Homeric analysis, he fastens on the key.<sup>108</sup>

As with the first elenchus, the purpose of Socrates' Homeric exegesis can be fully understood only in the light of Hippias' character. Socrates' approach here is uniquely suited to showing a professional Homerist the limits of his own method. The choice of Homer and the direction of the argument are tailored to Hippias' professional claims, his need for dialectical prompting, and his particular inability to distinguish capacity from disposition. The playful excursion into literary criticism thus serves a serious pedagogical purpose, for its claims are so ludicrous as to prod even Hippias into grasping a vital factor missing from the preceding argument. But if Hippias now sees the importance of disposition, this is only because, like the ignoramus (*amathēs*) who lacks the skill to tell a deliberate falsehood (367A 2-3), he has been lucky enough to stumble upon it, thanks to Socrates. He never relates his new insight to the earlier discussion, or shows any understanding of how the fallacy arose.

Nor does he display any awareness of the implications of this insight for his own life. Those like Odysseus and Hippias who are endowed with manifold skills must give careful thought to the ends for

<sup>106</sup> Reading *εὐνοίας* ('good will') with Burnet and others. Most MSS have *εὐηθείας* ('simplicity'), but see Calogero ad loc.

<sup>107</sup> The irony is compounded by the fact that 'noble' (*gennaios*) normally connotes frankness (cf. 366E 3). Socrates' locution foreshadows the 'noble lie' of *Rep.* 414B, and hints at the idea that falsehood may have positive value (below, p. 170).

<sup>108</sup> For a similar view see Phillips, 'PUH', 27-9.

which they employ their capacities. It is in this part of the dialogue that Socrates brings out the latent analogy between Hippias and Odysseus, with his teasing accusation that Hippias is 'deceiving' him and 'imitating' Odysseus (370E 10–11; cf. *Ion*. 541E 4). The verb 'imitate' (μιμῆ) suggests that Hippias' deception results from his Homeric education, while 'deceive' (ἐξαπατᾶς) implies that it is calculated. The latter is strenuously denied by Hippias (371A 1): whether he speaks truth or falsehood, his dialectical performance remains that of an *amathēs*.

## V

Socrates drops his suggestion that Achilles is a deliberate liar, apparently accepting Hippias' defence. But by prompting this defence, he has also got Hippias where he wants him for the dialogue's second main argument. Odysseus, Socrates declares, is 'better' than Achilles, since the purposeful liar has been shown to be 'better' than the inadvertent one (371E 4–7). This proposition has not been explicitly affirmed, but it can easily be derived from the assumptions of the earlier argument, and serves to tie together the two main stages of the dialogue.<sup>109</sup> After provoking Hippias into identifying the weakness of the first argument, Socrates is now juxtaposing this new perception with those earlier assumptions. Hippias is thus given an opportunity to apply his insight into the importance of intention to the original argument. He is now well placed to respond that deliberate liars were only proved better at their subject-matter, and hence better at lying, than inadvertent 'liars'—not that they are better people. The discussion of Achilles' intentions has given him the materials to argue that the inadvertent 'liar' may actually be superior, if, like Achilles, he or she acts from admirable motives. And this is indeed the path that Hippias takes. But he does not articulate his objection in terms of the earlier argument, appealing instead to custom and common sense, as enshrined in general opinion and the laws (*nomoi*) (371E 9–372A 5).<sup>110</sup>

<sup>109</sup> See Weiss, 'Ο Ἀγαθός', 295–6, and cf. Calogero, *IM* ix, xiii–xvi.

<sup>110</sup> For this *nomos* cf. *Ap.* 26A. Ritter points to the irony of Hippias' words, given his support for nature over convention (*EPT* 39; cf. n. 42 above). But a universal opinion may qualify as an unwritten (and hence 'natural') law (cf. *Xen. Mem.* 4. 4. 19–20). If indulgence for inadvertent wrongdoing falls into this category, then custom and positive law would provide evidence for its universality.

He is shocked by the threat to conventional notions of responsibility and punishment. Using his favourite grammatical construction for such moments, he asks how Socrates' conclusion 'could possibly be so' (371E 9–372A 2).<sup>111</sup>

Hippias' common-sense statement prompts another long speech from Socrates (372A 6–373A 8), which corresponds to his first discourse on Hippias' accomplishments (368A 8–369A 2). This time the subject is Socrates' own search for wisdom, as the dialogue's emphasis shifts from Hippias' goals and methods to those of Socrates. The two speeches crystallize the counterpoint between Socrates' ignorance, confusion,<sup>112</sup> and willingness to learn, and Hippias' reputed wisdom, complacent self-confidence, and refusal to accept the consequences of the argument. It is Socrates' present opinion, he says, that deliberate wrongdoers are superior, yet sometimes he thinks the opposite and 'wanders around',<sup>113</sup> clearly out of ignorance (372D 3–E 1).<sup>114</sup> Unlike Hippias, however, who blames disagreement and confusion on his interlocutor (369B 8–C 2, 370E 5, 373B 4–5), Socrates blames no one but himself (372D 2–3) and the argument (372E 3–4). He seems to have performed a kind of self-elenchus, uncovering a confusion within his own beliefs (cf. *Euthph.* 11D, *Meno* 80C). At a similar stage in other elenctic dialogues Socrates sometimes nudges the interlocutor in a more fruitful direction (cf. *Euthph.* 11E, *Meno* 81A).<sup>115</sup> Here too the subsequent argument will point towards a solution to the central problem of motivation. It also assumes a new tone, losing the heavy emphasis on Hippias himself as the source of every step (above, p. 147). In keeping, however, with his pose as Hippias' student, Socrates maintains that it is up to Hippias to 'heal' his soul from the 'fit' or 'seizure' visited on it by the argument (372E 1–373A 2).<sup>116</sup>

By emphasizing that his present opinion is 'opposite' not only to

<sup>111</sup> Cf. above, p. 137.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. 364B 6, 364C 9, 370D 7, 372B 3–C 2, 372D 7–373A 5, 376C 1–6 (cf. also Hoerber, *LHP* 124–7). *Contra* e.g. Gulley, *PS* 62–74, I take Socrates' avowals of ignorance to be sincere (see R. Kraut, *Socrates and the State* [SS] [Princeton, 1984], ch. 8; G. Vlastos, 'Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 35 [1985], 1–31).

<sup>113</sup> At *Ap.* 26A he appears to hold this opposite view.

<sup>114</sup> Socrates' perplexity here does not show (*pace* Vlastos, *Socrates*, supporting essay for ch. 5) that Socrates is unaware of the equivocation underlying the first elenchus, since the paradox that provokes his confusion does not rest on the ambiguity of *pseudēs*.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Guthrie, *HGP* iv. 167–8, 180.

<sup>116</sup> The medical analogy was popular with the sophists (see Guthrie, *HGP* iii. 167–9), and may have been used by Hippias (cf. *Prot.* 357E).

Hippias' common-sense view (372D 4) but to his own judgement on other occasions (372D 7), Socrates reminds us of the inconsistency with which Achilles said 'the opposite to himself' (371A 6-7). By the standard applied to Achilles, Socrates himself is *pseudēs*. This analogy with Achilles (rather than Odysseus) is reinforced by Socrates' denial of knowledge, since, according to the earlier argument, such ignorance disqualifies him as a calculating *pseudēs*. The connection is brought out by linguistic echoes, which associate Socrates' avowal of ignorance with the ineptness of the *amathēs* at deliberate falsehood.<sup>117</sup> Hippias will accuse Socrates of causing a disturbance in the argument and 'doing wrong' (373B 4-5),<sup>118</sup> by which he presumably means manipulating the argument in a calculated way (cf. 371E 9-372A 5). But Socrates underlines his own resemblance to Achilles by mischievously replying that this behaviour is not purposeful, and hence, according to Hippias' own argument, merits forgiveness (373B 6-9).

A brief reappearance by Eudicus punctuates the work at this transitional point (373A 5-C 3). Though Homer and his characters have been formally left behind,<sup>119</sup> the return of Eudicus, addressed as 'son of Apemantus' (373A 6),<sup>120</sup> serves to remind us of the Homeric question that initiated the discussion, the setting amongst philosophically interested bystanders, and the educational implications of both. Eudicus reminds Hippias of the professional consistency by which he originally set such store (373A 9-B 3; cf. 363C 7-D 4, 364D 3-6), and begs him to answer, for the sake of the company and his own earlier claims (373C 1-3).<sup>121</sup> This appeal is aimed directly at Hippias' professional pride. Besides adverting to his initial claims, it touches discreetly on the presence of an interested audience,<sup>122</sup> on whose approbation Hippias' professional success depends. When he does agree to continue, it is for Eudicus' sake (373C 4; cf. *Gorg.* 501c), which shows his unwillingness to fail the expectations of this listener in particular. It was, after all, Eudicus who prompted Hippias' original assertion of professional consistency (363C 4-6). And it was probably

<sup>117</sup> *Ἀμαθία* 372C 1, 373A 1, cf. 367A 2; διὰ τὸ μὴ εἰδέναι 372D 8-9, cf. 367A 3; contrast with Hippias' *sophos*, 372B 4-C 2, cf. 367A 4.

<sup>118</sup> On this verb (*κακουργέω*) in the dialogue see Weiss, 'Ὁ Ἀγαθός', 300 n. 49.

<sup>119</sup> The last mention of them is at 371E.

<sup>120</sup> Calogero suggests that this appellation has a mock-Homeric ring (ad loc.). But it also recalls the context of Socrates' opening question (363A 6-B 5).

<sup>121</sup> Waterfield translates τὴν προειρημένων σοι λόγων (373C 2) as 'the previous discussion'. But this misses the antithesis (ἡμῶν ... σοι), and the echo of 373B 1-2 (τὰ προειρημένα). Jowett captures the right emphasis.

<sup>122</sup> On ἡμῶν ἔνεκα (373C 2) see Calogero ad loc. and cf. *Gorg.* 497b.

he who sponsored the present occasion (above, p. 135). If Hippias backs out now, he faces the potential loss of an admirer and client, and perhaps of others like him who are now awaiting his response to Eudicus' plea. Failure to live up to his own professions will shake the claim to wisdom which constitutes his livelihood. Pride, consistency, and his very *métier* as a sophist thus oblige him to continue. But the same professional pride which so constrains him will only seal his professional humiliation.

Socrates accordingly proceeds with his argument to prove the superiority of the purposeful wrongdoer. The argument takes the form of a massive *epagōgē*, or inference from examples, based on an extensive list of human activities. The argument proceeds from a wide variety of physical accomplishments (373C 9–374E 2), to tool-using skills (374E 3–375A 7), and finally to capacities of the human soul (375A 7–D 2).<sup>123</sup> The numerous examples seem carefully chosen to lure Hippias gradually from the apparently obvious to a far from obvious conclusion.<sup>124</sup> In each case Socrates argues that those who purposefully perform each activity badly are better than those who do so despite themselves. Hippias agrees with each step, though his responses are always brief, and often limited or grudging (e.g. 374A 1, 374A 6, 374B 3, 374D 7). But he balks at the conclusion that the soul that does wrong deliberately is superior to the one that does so despite itself (375D 1–2).

He is right to have misgivings at this point. Socrates is not justified in extending the argument from specific skills to conclusions about the human soul as such. If he proves anything about human excellence, it is that it is best to be in control of achieving the goals one sets oneself.<sup>125</sup> This would be a fair way to summarize the *sophia* of an Odysseus, but it does not necessarily coincide with human excellence as such, in particular with moral excellence. Each skill has internal goals, such as hitting whatever one aims at, but society establishes other, external goals, such as hitting a proposed target, which affect our evaluation of the performer. This is implicitly acknowledged in Socrates' argument, when he speaks of running slowly, taking a wrestling fall, ugliness of posture, and poor

<sup>123</sup> The same argument appears more concisely at Xen. *Mem.* 4. 2. 19–20, but Xenophon may have derived it from *H. Min.* (cf. Calogero, *IM* xii n. 2).

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Robinson, *PED* 43; Calogero ad loc. The wide range of examples recalls Hippias' polymathy, but there is little overlap with his skills.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. the earlier definition of *dunatos* (366B 7–C 4; cf. also *H. Ma.* 295E–296A).

musicianship as 'shameful' even when purposeful (373E 1-5, 374A 3-6, 374B 6, 375C 2).<sup>126</sup> The slowest runner may in fact be the most skilled at running, but will never win the race. Likewise Odysseus may be most skilful at accomplishing his own goals, but unless these coincide with the goals of morality he will never be endorsed as simply 'best'.

The earlier discussion of Achilles' motives offered Hippias a clue which might have helped him isolate these difficulties. But instead he simply protests, using his characteristic idiom: 'it would be *deinos*' if this were so (375D 3-4). His response to the paradox has not altered since it was first aired (cf. 371E 9-372A 5). He has stuck to his guns, but made no progress in understanding. He cannot see why the conclusion follows (375D 6), yet nor can he identify any flaw in the reasoning or give reasons for his opposition. Socrates therefore tacitly shows him what is wrong with the argument, by supplying a vital missing premiss. Is not justice necessarily, he says, 'some kind of capacity (*dunamis*) or knowledge or both?' (375D 8-E 1). Why, asks Guthrie (*HGP* iv. 195 n. 3), should Hippias agree to this? Given his character and profession such agreement is only to be expected. It reflects the confidence of the polymathic educator who professes to be skilled, and able to impart his skill, in all manner of subjects, including virtue.<sup>127</sup> It is quite natural, then, that he should not wish to challenge Socrates' characterization of justice. Armed with this concession, Socrates can extend his *epagōgē* to include justice: the juster soul will be wiser and more capable, and thus have a greater capacity for opposites; hence when it performs unjust deeds it will do so purposefully; hence he who does wrong purposefully (if any such person exists) is the good man (*agathos*) (375E 1-376B 6). This *epagōgē* has been criticized for passing illegitimately from functional to moral excellence.<sup>128</sup> But the introduction of justice as a kind of knowledge or capacity successfully bridges the gap and justifies Socrates' paradoxical conclusion.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>126</sup> On this aspect of the argument cf. Cologero on 373E; Weiss, 'O *Ἀγαθός*', 297-8. On the distinction between knowledge of a skill and knowledge of aims cf. Gulley, *PS* 88.

<sup>127</sup> See n. 42 above, and cf. J. Moreau, *La Construction de l'idéalisme platonicien* (Paris, 1939), 107-8.

<sup>128</sup> e.g. by Grote, *Plato*, ii. 68-9; Sprague, *PUF* 74-5; Mulhern, 'TP' 287-8; Guthrie, *HGP* iv. 195; Gomperz, *GT* ii. 295. But Socrates recognized no such distinction (cf. O'Brien, *SPGM* 100n.; Irwin, *PMT* 287 n. 3; Weiss, 'O *Ἀγαθός*', 299; T. Penner, 'Socrates on Virtue and Motivation' ['SVM'], in E. N. Lee, A. P. D. Mourelatos, and R. M. Rorty (eds.), *Exegesis and Argument* [Assen, 1973], 141-2).

<sup>129</sup> The argument is defended along these lines by (among others) Friedländer, *Plato*, 143-4; O'Brien, *SPGM* 100n.; Penner, 'SVM' 139-42; Weiss, 'O *Ἀγαθός*', 298-302.

Justice remains, however, crucially different from other skills.<sup>130</sup> As a kind of knowledge or capacity it has its own internal goals like any other craft. But unlike other skills, it cannot be used 'badly' for immoral goals outside its own sphere of activity, since its internal goals are precisely those of morality. Nor can one choose not to use the skill at all, like a helmsman who lets the ship drift against the rocks (as opposed to deliberately steering it there). We may compare Socrates' own case of the man who deliberately lames himself (374c 6–d 2). As Aristotle points out, this is a poorly chosen example, since such a person would scarcely be considered superior to one who became lame accidentally (*Metaph.* 1025<sup>a</sup>9–13; cf. also *NE* 1129<sup>a</sup>11–16). No one, it is assumed, would choose to inflict such unequivocal evil on him- or herself. The case is even clearer with the soul, the seat of true human excellence and well-being, whose 'health' is justice.<sup>131</sup> While situations might conceivably arise where one would deliberately choose self-inflicted physical harm, no possible circumstances could justify knowingly committing an injustice and so harming one's own soul (cf. 372e 6–373a 2). For it is a fact of human nature that we all seek our own good, namely happiness,<sup>132</sup> and in Socrates' view this is inseparable from virtue (cf. *Ap.* 30b). Hence there can be no such person as one who voluntarily does wrong (though if there could be, this person would also be truly wise and good). This is the familiar Socratic paradox, taken into account by Socrates' proviso that the voluntary doer of 'unjust and shameful deeds' is the good man, 'if indeed there is such a one' (376b 5–6).<sup>133</sup> This proviso brings the argument into line with the Socratic paradox, and thus saves its conclusion, despite appearances, from flouting Hippias' common-sense view in an

<sup>130</sup> See Taylor, *Plato*, 38; O'Brien, *SPGM* 106; Gulley, *PS* 16, 85–7; Irwin, *PMT* 77–9; Zembaty, 'SPPHM' 62–3; J. Gould, *The Development of Plato's Ethics* (Cambridge, 1955), 43–4.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. *Crito* 47d–48a, *Gorg.* 504a–505b, 512a–b, *Rep.* 444c–e; Irwin, *PMT* 58–9.

<sup>132</sup> See Penner, 'SVM' 142, 147–8; and cf. Gulley, *PS* 87, 91–2; Santas, *Socrates*, ch. 6; J. M. E. Moravcsik, 'Plato and Pericles on Freedom and Politics' ['PPFP'], *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, suppl. 11 (1983), 15.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. also 376a 6–7 (ὁτανπερ ἀδικῇ) and Calogero ad loc. The significance of 376b 5–6 has often been observed (e.g. by Taylor, *Plato*, 37; Sprague, *PUF* 76; Hoerber, 'LHP' 128; O'Brien, *SPGM* 104; Penner, 'SVM' 140–1; Guthrie, *HGP* iv. 197–8; Irwin, *PMT* 77; for a different view see G. Müller, 'Platonische Freiwilligkeit im *Hippias Elatton*' ['PF'], *Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft*, 5 [1979], 65, 74–5). As Hoerber points out, Socrates uses similar provisos elsewhere for commonly accepted premisses to which he does not want to commit himself (*Euthph.* 7d 8, 8e 6, *Gorg.* 480e 5–6; cf. also *Rep.* 381c 1, cited by Pohlenz, *PW* 65). The proviso would be pointless here if Socrates accepted the conventional view that such people abound.

offensive way. For it succeeds in evading the morally repugnant conclusion that the numerous people who appear to do wrong purposefully are superior to those who do so inadvertently. Here is Socrates' own oblique solution to the problem of motivation. But it can succeed only at the expense of common sense, since it abandons any conventional notion of voluntariness,<sup>134</sup> with disturbingly counter-intuitive consequences.

The proviso also has interesting implications for the earlier part of the dialogue. The whole discussion was based on the assumption that Odysseus is indeed 'such a one'.<sup>135</sup> But the last stage of the argument, by identifying justice as a skill, has suggested that the *polutropos* who lies and deceives without regard for virtue (cf. 365E 2–9) is deficient in this skill, and hence does not really know what he is doing. The earlier analysis of Odysseus as a deliberate wrongdoer must therefore have been, in Socratic terms, mistaken. Like the archer who deliberately misses the target, Odysseus achieves the goals he sets himself. But he fails to understand the significance of the common target, for he is deficient in the craft of justice. Achilles, on the other hand, aims at the goals of popular morality—truth-telling, loyalty, and friendship. But his aim is sometimes shaky, which leads him into unplanned self-contradiction. There turns out, then, to be an elusive truth in Socrates' claim to find the two heroes indistinguishable 'in respect of falsehood and truth and the rest of *aretē*' (370E 2–3). The passage exemplifies what Vlastos calls 'complex irony', that is, the superficially and ironically untrue expression of a deeper underlying truth.<sup>136</sup> Socrates knows very well the characterological differences between the two Homeric heroes, but would grant neither the requisite skill to succeed at virtue.

During the last stage of the argument Hippias continues to agree briefly with each step, but once again firmly rejects the conclusion (376B 7). He thus displays the courage of his convictions to the bitter end. This must be distinguished, however, from true dialectical courage, which requires one to persevere in a difficult argument, to accept radical conclusions, and to admit it when one is proved

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Müller, 'PF' 63.

<sup>135</sup> It is primarily Hippias who takes this view of Odysseus (cf. n. 162 below), but Socrates too classes purposeful lies with injustice (372D 5). Cf. also the pejorative view of Odysseus at *Ap.* 41B–C (see n. 142 below).

<sup>136</sup> Vlastos, 'SI' 86 (though Vlastos himself does not see such irony here).



wrong.<sup>137</sup> To Socrates the conclusion 'is apparent' from the argument (375 D 5), and he expects a similar commitment from Hippias (375 D 7), who has agreed with each step and should therefore be bound by the conclusion, unless he can challenge it. Unlike some of Socrates' other interlocutors, Hippias does not grow angry, accept the argument only with an ill grace, or agree merely for the sake of argument or to escape from Socrates. But he never produces *arguments* for his resistance. Time and again he is shown incapable of rationally defending his conventional moral intuitions. By refusing to accept the consequences of an argument to which he has agreed at every stage, and which he is unable to criticize, he displays his lack of dialectical integrity.<sup>138</sup>

Like Odysseus *polutropos*, Hippias has enjoyed a high degree of conventional success, using his versatile cleverness to defeat numerous opponents and achieve his own goals, and hence winning the admiration of the many. But he also resembles Odysseus in lacking a true understanding of the aims to which this cleverness should be put. The inadequacy of his goals from a Socratic perspective is made clear by his dialectical humiliation. Socrates puts a stop (however temporary) to his career of Odyssean success, by showing that the assumptions and reputation which underlie that success lack a sound intellectual foundation. Hippias has finally met the one opponent who can overthrow him, by reducing him to inconsistency and confusion. These inconsistencies make Hippias an inadvertent 'liar', like the ignoramus of the first argument, who stumbles on truth or falsity without expert understanding of his subject.

But Socrates is in the same boat. For when Hippias declares for the last time that he cannot agree, Socrates does not continue to insist that he abandon his intuitive views in face of the argument (contrast 375 D 5-7). Instead he replies that he too is unable to agree with himself (376 B 8-9; cf. 372 E 3-4). He refuses to abandon the argument, yet will not lightly dismiss the claims of common sense.<sup>139</sup> Both he and Hippias remain caught in the same elenctic trap, between the 'necessity' of the argument (376 B 8) and the demands of intuitive moral conviction. Yet Socrates' response to this dilemma is in significant contrast to Hippias' inability or refusal to engage the issue. He displays his intellectual integrity by pursuing the paradoxical

<sup>137</sup> See R. Patterson, 'Plato on Philosophic Character', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 25 (1987), 345-9; and cf. 366 E 3 with Calogero ad loc.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. Grote, *Plato*, ii. 62, and n. 35 above.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Kraut, SS 220.

implications of the notion that virtue is a kind of knowledge, and facing its counter-intuitive consequences.<sup>140</sup> Common sense, as represented by Hippias and Socrates' own uncertainty, still resists. But unlike Hippias, Socrates is not content to leave these intuitions unexamined. Common sense and tradition, the indispensable starting-points for ethical enquiry, must not be abandoned too readily, yet they are always open to elenctic scrutiny. Socrates responds to bewilderment, not by stubborn or dogmatic rejection of the argument, but by continuing his enquiry in the hope of further progress.

Socrates concludes that his own confusion is unsurprising, if the 'wise' like Hippias are as confused as ordinary people like himself, who therefore cannot turn to them for help (376C 3-6). The close of the dialogue thus returns us to the educational roots of the discussion. So far from succeeding in enlightening others (cf. 364C 3-4), the Homeric educator has himself turned out to lack both wisdom and consistency. He and other professional *sophoi* share in the 'wandering'—the intellectual confusion and inconsistency—from which Socrates himself longs to rest (376C 1-6; cf. 372D 7-E 1, *H. Ma.* 304C 2). In the context of the dialogue this metaphor evokes the tradition of Odysseus, most famous of all reluctant wanderers. Unlike the aimless confusion of Hippias and his ilk, Socrates' 'wandering', like that of Odysseus, is directed at an ultimate goal. For as he tells us in the *Apology*, he is quite literally 'wandering' in search of wisdom (22A 6). Like Odysseus, he accumulates a kind of wisdom from those he visits in the course of his travels (cf. *Ap.* 21D 2-E 2).<sup>141</sup> His search will continue even in the underworld, where he envisages Odysseus himself awaiting Socratic scrutiny of his notorious *sophia* (*Ap.* 41C 1).<sup>142</sup> In the context of this larger journey Hippias is just one port of call along the way (376C 5; cf. *Ap.* 23B 4-7).

<sup>140</sup> See Grote, *Plato*, i. 399-400, ii. 63-6; the appendix to Kraut, SS; Vlastos, *Socrates*, supporting essay for ch. 5; and cf. Weiss, 'O Ἀγαθός', 300-1.

<sup>141</sup> For Odysseus see Finley, *HO* 41-54 (though his learning is of a different kind).

<sup>142</sup> Cf. J. Burnet (ed.), *Plato: Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates, Crito* (Oxford, 1924), ad loc. Odysseus' *sophia* appears here in a distinctly negative light, for Socrates sympathizes with two victims of his treachery (Ajax and Palamedes) and couples him with Sisyphus (41B-C).

## VI

I have tried to show how Plato uses characterization to dramatize the ways in which personality and individual circumstances affect a person's openness to philosophical enquiry and ability to learn from the Socratic challenge. Hippias' way of life as a professional sophist, his personality, views, and methods, induce a complacency that resists the salutary effects of elenctic bewilderment. This failure bears witness to the inadequacy of the professed polymath and educator as a student of both ethics and dialectic, and also to the personal character of the Socratic method, which is rooted in and hence exposes, for better or worse, the individual traits of the interlocutors.

But the dialogue also concerns matters of vital general importance—the nature and effects of contemporary education—and accordingly the refutation of Hippias has more than personal significance. For one thing his language, values, and mentality characterize him as a mouthpiece for unreflective common sense, voicing the superficial responses of ordinary people nurtured on a cultural tradition to which Homer was central. The inadequacy of such popular values was a matter of grave concern to Plato, especially when, as here, it assumed the mantle of 'wisdom' (cf. *Rep.* 493A). Despite Hippias' vaunted *sophia*, he proves incapable of rationally defending his views, which are merely the conventional attitudes of the many and lack any sound intellectual foundation.

Besides representing ordinary values, Hippias lays claim to wisdom as a member of a particular class—one which offered Plato a most serious philosophical threat. In the two methodological passages (369D 1–E 2, 372A 6–C 8) Socrates counts Hippias as one *sophos* among many, and his closing comment broadens the implications of Hippias' discomfiture to *sophoi* generally, who, as contrasted with the 'lay person' (*ιδιώτης* 376C 4), are presumably other professional sophists.<sup>143</sup> Hippias' dialectical incompetence reflects on the pretensions of his peers, especially given his enormous professional success. Socrates is not merely worsting another individual, but displaying the intellectual and educational superiority of his own methods and goals

<sup>143</sup> Plato groups Hippias with other sophists in *Prot.* (cf. esp. 358A–359A), and at *H. Ma.* 281A–282E, *Ap.* 19C, *Phaedrus* 267B. On Hippias as a 'generic sophist' see Woodruff, *HM* 114–15, 131. On Plato's use of typical respondents and subjects of general significance cf. Stokes, *PSC* 27–9.

over those of his most influential rivals. If Plato's mocking irony also invites us to laugh at Hippias, this is not because he and his ilk are not dangerous competitors, but because one way to disarm the threat he represents is by revealing his essential triviality. As Plato was to suggest in the *Republic*, inappropriate educational models may be represented with salutary effect as figures of fun (396D–E).

The dialogue also shows Socrates grappling with the two supreme Homeric paradigms, Achilles and Odysseus, and exploring their value as educational models. This theme is intimately related to that of Hippias' personal inadequacy, and the two are brought together in the figure of the sophist. For he is not just a sophistic Homerist and representative of Homeric education, but emerges as himself a Homeric figure in the most dubious sense. His most obvious Homeric counterpart is Odysseus *polutropos*, who turns out to be a more appropriate sophistic ancestor than the wise old Nestor whom Hippias originally proposed as a paradigm of *sophia* (364C 6).<sup>144</sup> But the intellectual failure of Hippias *polutropos*, in particular his inability to use his Odyssean skills in defence of his intuitive judgements, calls into question the intrinsic value of those skills.

The dialogue's critique of the Odyssean character has implications which extend beyond the discrediting of the sophists. Versatility, cleverness, and love of debate were prized aspects of the Athenian self-image.<sup>145</sup> This is clear from Thucydides, for whom the Athenian character is a central preoccupation.<sup>146</sup> These characteristics are closely associated with Athenian democracy: 'The democratic view-

<sup>144</sup> On Odysseus and the sophists see Stanford, *UT* 95–100, and cf. Blundell, 'MCO' 326–9.

<sup>145</sup> Hoerber alleges that polymathy was a matter of ridicule to 'the Greeks' (*LHP* 124). But besides the famous polemical remark of Heraclitus (22 B 40 DK) and a reference to the *Margites* (which does not condemn polymathy *per se*: *Margites* is an utter fool who fails at everything; see esp. fr. 2–3 Allen), all his examples come from Plato (cf. n. 148 below). The value of polymathy was a matter of some philosophical debate (see Kerferd, *SM* 41, and cf. Sept. Sap. 10. 3. α. 3 DK, Hippon 38 B 3 DK, Anaxarch. 72 B 1 DK, Democr. 68 B 64, 65, 299 DK, Isoc. 1. 18). Hippias' success shows it was not scorned by the general public (cf. also Ar. *Wasps* 1174–5), and in the Hellenistic period it was explicitly admired (cf. Pfeiffer, *HCS* 138).

<sup>146</sup> For Athenian cleverness and love of debate cf. Thuc. 3. 37–8, 3. 42–3. For versatility cf. Thuc. 1. 71. 3, 2. 37. 1, 2. 40. 2–3, 2. 41. 1. On the Athenian character cf. also B. M. W. Knox, *Oedipus at Thebes* (New Haven, 1957), 65, 67–77. On Plato's response to the Periclean democratic ideal see Moravcsik, 'PPFP'; cf. also *Menexenus* (of which Hippias is said to have been a butt: 86 A 13 DK; cf. Untersteiner, *The Sophists*, 275 n. 5), and J. S. Rusten (ed.), *Thucydides: The Peloponnesian War, Book II* (Cambridge, 1989), 29.

point (typically that of a seafaring and commercial community) is Odyssean—an ideal of versatility, adaptability, diplomatic skill, and intellectual curiosity, insisting on success combined with glory rather than sacrificed for it.<sup>147</sup> Hippias fits this description perfectly (he was even a highly successful diplomat: *H. Ma.* 281A 3–B 1). The same versatile character type, as viewed by a more jaundiced eye, lies behind Plato's hostile portrait of the democratic man, with his 'multifarious' (*pantodapos*) life and emotions (*Rep.* 561E 3; cf. 557C 1, 559D 9).<sup>148</sup> It is likewise the emotional and inconsistent character, rather than the truly wise (*phronimos*) and self-consistent one, which appeals to the ignorant and 'multifarious' masses who make up the Athenian theatrical audience (*Rep.* 604E 1–6).<sup>149</sup> It is therefore that poet 'who is able through his *sophia* to become multifarious' (398A 1) who will win the approval of the crowd (605A 2–6). Similarly Socrates remarks in the *Gorgias* that the successful orator must come to resemble the Athenian populace (513B; cf. also 481D–E). Hippias too, in his own way, uses his 'multifarious' speeches (368D 2; cf. 363C 1), his poetry and other skills, to win both applause and other more practical rewards from the many.

The elenchus of the versatile Hippias thus constitutes an assault on the Odyssean type as a cultural paradigm, and with it on the democratic character for which Plato harboured such deep suspicion.<sup>150</sup> But Hippias is not exclusively Odyssean in character. In particular, he lacks Odysseus' lying disposition. He rejects the analogy between himself and Odysseus by denying that he (deliberately) deceives (371A 1). He also displays an Achillean side in sticking to his own

<sup>147</sup> Knox, *HT* 121–2. For Odysseus as the embodiment of certain Athenian virtues cf. Irwin, 'STH' 69–71; North, *MI* 75.

<sup>148</sup> For Plato's hostility to polymathy cf. *H. Ma.* 285E 10–286A 2, *Ion* 541E, *Phaedrus* 275A–B, *Soph.* 232B–233C, *Laws* 810E–811B, 819A, *Rep.* 369E–370C, 475C–476B; cf. also *Alc. II* 147A–E, *Amatores*, Xen. *Mem.* 4. 4. 6. On the connection with poetry and education see Vicaire, *Platon*, 195–6.

<sup>149</sup> *Pantodapos* is often used pejoratively in the *Republic*, for the emotions of the masses (431B 9, 493D 1, 588E 5), for poetry (397C 5, 399E 10), and for the mythic transformations of the gods (381E 4, 381E 9). Cf. also *Ion* 541E, where it is used for the transformations of Proteus, as a metaphor for Ion's inconsistency. The Homeric equivalent (*pantoios*) is used both for divine transformation (*Od.* 17. 486) and for Odysseus' wiles (*Od.* 3. 122, *Il.* 3. 202).

<sup>150</sup> Athens is Plato's principal target, but Hippias' type is not peculiarly Athenian. He came from Elis, rarely visited Athens (*H. Ma.* 281A, Xen. *Mem.* 4. 4. 5), often travelled to other cities (*H. Ma.* 281A–B), and was highly successful in the pan-Hellenic forum of the Olympic games (cf. above, p. 136). Note, however, that although he was popular in anti-democratic Sparta, he made no money there (*H. Ma.* 283B).

conventional ethical views even though they snare him in inconsistency, thus making him, like Achilles, an unintentional *pseudēs*.<sup>151</sup> Despite his instinctive respect for certain moral values, however, Achilles too falls short as an ethical model. The inherent weakness of this character type is erratic behaviour arising from the indulgence of violent emotion.<sup>152</sup> In the *Republic*, where Plato is explicitly concerned with the damaging influence of poetic representations of character, Achilles is blamed among other things for his 'womanish' tears (387E–388B), insubordinate rudeness (389E), defiance of the gods, and violent lack of self-control towards his enemies (391A–C). In *Hippias Minor* too he seems to lack the rational skill and evenness of temper to speak and act consistently. Thus each hero is in his own way philosophically and ethically deficient, and hence inappropriate as an educational model.

Neither hero, however, always fares so badly at Plato's hands. Socrates treats Achilles with respect in the *Apology*, where he is portrayed as an antecedent and model for Socrates' own courageous refusal to abandon his principles even in the face of death (28C–D).<sup>153</sup> Plato also alludes admiringly several times to Achilles' self-sacrifice for Patroclus.<sup>154</sup> As for Odysseus, Plato more than once cites with approval his exhortation to his own spirit to endure.<sup>155</sup> He also makes a characteristically prudent choice in the myth of Er, deciding to rest from his previous ambition with its accompanying troubles, and choosing the life of a private citizen (*Rep.* 620C). This quiet (*apragmōn*) life is a departure from the meddling in multiple roles (*polupragmosunē*) which constitutes injustice,<sup>156</sup> and which characterizes the decline of

<sup>151</sup> O'Brien suggests that Hippias' candour aligns him with Achilles (*SPGM* 101). Cf. also W. Schneidewin, *Platons zweiter Hippiasdialog [PZH]* (Paderborn, 1931), 33.

<sup>152</sup> In the myth of Er this type is represented by Ajax, who chooses the life of a lion (*Rep.* 620B). On Ajax as an Achillean character and the contrast between him and Odysseus see Blundell, *HFHE* 83 n. 116; Irwin, 'STH' 59; and cf. Arist. *Top.* 117<sup>b</sup> 12–25.

<sup>153</sup> On this passage see Irwin, 'STH' 77; M. W. Blundell, 'The *Phusis* of Neoptolemus in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*', *Greece and Rome*, 35 (1988), 142–3. Cf. also *Crito* 44B with King, *Achilles*, 106–8.

<sup>154</sup> *H. Ma.* 292E, *Sym.* 179E, 208C–D. For other Platonic references to Achilles' pursuit of honour and principle see A. Calderini, 'Intorno ad Ulisse e Achille in Platone' ['IUAP'], *Riconditi Istituto Lombardo*, 39 (1906), 1006–7.

<sup>155</sup> *Od.* 20. 17–18, quoted at *Rep.* 390D, 441B, *Phaedo* 94D. For other favourable references to Odysseus in Plato and Xenophon see Stanford, *UT* 261 n. 30; Calderini, 'IUAP' 1007–9. Cf. also M. C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge, 1986), 105–6.

<sup>156</sup> *Rep.* 434B 6–C 5, 444B 1–5; cf. 433A 8–9, 443C 8–D 3, 433D 1–5, 551E 6–552A 2. For the political implications of *polupragmosunē* (associated with 5th-cent. Athenian democracy) and *apragmosunē* (associated with oligarchy and Sparta) see H. North,

the ideal state (*Rep.* 434A 9–B 7; cf. 551E 6). Odysseus is the only reincarnated soul in the myth of Er who does not persist in the behaviour of his previous life, but learns from and reacts against it.<sup>157</sup> This decision exemplifies his characteristic rational prudence. But by learning to eschew the follies of *polupragmosunē*, of public life and worldly ambition, he has also taken an essential step towards philosophical wisdom. Thus in the *Phaedo* the philosopher who wins immortality is one who does not care about money or ambition (82C), and in the *Gorgias*, the one who attains the Isles of the Blessed is a private citizen, especially a philosopher, who has not only lived 'piously and with truth', but 'done his own job and not meddled with many things in his life' (τὰ αὐτοῦ πράξαντος καὶ οὐ πολυπραγμονήσαντος ἐν τῷ βίῳ) (526C)

Each of the two great heroes thus has a potentially admirable aspect, and in each case this is adumbrated in *Hippias Minor*. Achilles' inconsistencies arise from commendable moral instincts, while Odysseus embodies rational skill in pursuit of one's chosen goals. These positive aspects are redeemed and united in the figure of Socrates, who shares the virtues of both characters without their corresponding defects.<sup>158</sup> At first glance he may seem to have more in common with the slippery, persuasive and verbal Odysseus than with Achilles, the man of action who falls short of others in discussion (*Il.* 18. 105–6).<sup>159</sup> He seems to have the skill of the *polutropos* to speak either truth or falsehood at will. What distinguishes him, however, from both Hippias and Odysseus is his integrity—the same trait that makes Achilles an appropriate parallel in the *Apology*. Like Achilles, his inconsistencies arise not from calculation but 'nobly' and from 'good will' towards others as well as himself (cf. 373A 4–5, *Ap.* 30A). His values may not precisely coincide with the instincts of tradition or common sense, but he pursues them with the heroic single-mindedness of an Achilles. To this end he employs his Odyssean cleverness in the one crucial area where Hippias fails: the dialectical

*Sophrosyne* (Ithaca, 1966), 96, 98, 101–3, 105, 107; V. Ehrenberg, 'Polypragmosyne: A Study in Greek Politics' ['Polypragmosyne'], *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 67 (1947), 46–67.

<sup>157</sup> M. E. Hirst, 'The Choice of Odysseus (Plato *Republic* 620C–D)', *Classical Philology*, 35 (1940), 67–8. In this he also differs from those reincarnated at *Phaedo* 81E–82B. Hirst notes that in Dio 52. 12 and Eur. fr. 787 N<sup>2</sup> Odysseus contrasts his own active life with living quietly (*apragmonōs*). But in both cases his 'real' life is represented as superior.

<sup>158</sup> For a similar view of Socrates see Irwin, 'STH' 77–83.

<sup>159</sup> For Socrates as Odyssean cf. Schneidewin, *PZH* 31–4; Hoerber, *LHP* 131; O'Brien, *SPGM* 102–3.

pursuit of true wisdom, regardless of the approval of the many. This constitutes his own idiosyncratic form of *polupragmosunē* (cf. *Ap.* 31C 5), one concerned not with public ambition but with the improvement of individual souls.<sup>160</sup>

Socrates' irony and insidious argumentation might seem superficially to belie any Achillean concern with truth. But he uses his Odyssean skills in the service of philosophical education, and hence of a truth that transcends mere verbal truthfulness. Hippias, with his vast range of knowledge and celebrated mnemonic technique, is living proof that dialectical insight is not reached through the rote acquisition of merely factual truths. Socrates' provocative arguments form part of the educational strategy of his elenchus, by challenging common sense and providing openings for Hippias to come to its rescue. Unmistakable echoes of the *Apology* make it clear that Socrates' manner in *Hippias Minor* should not be considered alien to his overall philosophical mission to improve the souls of his interlocutors (cf. *Ap.* 21C, 30A). This view is confirmed by his suggestion that the dialectical method will benefit Hippias (373A 5).<sup>161</sup> Ironical mockery is part of this method, in so far as it serves to stimulate philosophical progress (cf. *Xen. Mem.* 4. 2. 1–5). The purpose is not to mislead Hippias, but to provoke him into thinking for himself. This kind of 'falsehood' is not designed ultimately to deceive, and so should not be branded as duplicitous.<sup>162</sup> Nor need it undermine Socrates' sincerity as an enquirer who professes his own ignorance.<sup>163</sup> But the skill that makes such purposeful 'falsehood' possible must be used by the right people for the right ends.<sup>164</sup>

<sup>160</sup> Cf. Ehrenberg, 'Polypragmosyne', 57, 60.

<sup>161</sup> This passage is neglected by those who exclude Hippias from the educational beneficiaries of the conversation (e.g. Friedländer, *Plato*, 145, Sprague, *PUF* 78–9).

<sup>162</sup> On the difference between outright deceit (which is alien to Socrates) and the kind of irony that challenges its audience to solve a riddle see Vlastos, 'SI' 93–5; cf. also Koyré, *DP* 3–7; R. S. W. Hawtrey, *Commentary on Plato's Euthydemus* (Philadelphia, 1981), 17–20. As Weiss notes ('O' *Ἀγαθός*', 296, 300), it is Hippias who associates deliberate falsehood with 'injustice' (371E 9–372A 3, 375D 3–4; cf. also 365E 2–9, 369C 4–5, 371A 1; Calogero on 375C–D; and n. 78 above). She suggests that this troubles Socrates, while O'Brien claims that both Hippias and Socrates 'unhesitatingly' classify lying as 'immoral' (*SPGM* 104). But the evidence for Socrates (370E 2–3, 372D 5) does not exclude the possibility of justifiable falsehood (as opposed to deception). The lies of Homer's Odysseus may also be defended in terms of his goals (see Stanford, *UT* 20–1, and cf. Blundell, *HFHE* 83), but in contrast to Socrates' 'falsehoods' they remain lies.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. Vlastos, 'SI' 86, and n. 112 above.

<sup>164</sup> See Friedländer, *Plato* 138–46. Vlastos objects to Friedländer's portrait of Socrates as an arch-deceiver ('SI' 93; *Socrates*, ch. 5). But if *pseudēs* is taken to mean



Hippias' character and performance make it clear that the Homeric studies pursued by him and so many others provide no basis for a sound moral or intellectual education. This mode of teaching and learning is not without effect, but it has left him with only the least desirable traits of the characters in whom he professes expertise. In place of this Homeric education, based on the uncritical acceptance of stereotypical models, Plato offers us a Socratic one which challenges both the interlocutor and the audience to seek to understand the issues for themselves.<sup>165</sup> This educational strategy is rooted in individual character, as we can see from the way Socrates adapts the argument to Hippias' personality, in an effort to goad the sophist towards a better understanding of the goals and limitations of his own abilities. These abilities, which are clearly considerable, give Hippias a claim on Socrates' pedagogical attention. But there is little indication that he learns anything from it, unless the silencing of his boastful rhetoric is a first step—small but essential—on the road to self-knowledge.<sup>166</sup> Yet Socrates' original audience and Plato's greater audience, including ourselves, can try to learn from his mistakes. Authentic philosophical and moral progress requires real intellectual engagement, not superficial familiarity with literary models or with 'quantities of miscellaneous information'.<sup>167</sup> Hippias' popular success as an itinerant intellectual pales before Socrates' integrity and commitment to the truth.

While Socrates practises his own dynamic pedagogical method, Plato himself learns a lesson from tradition and presents us with his own pair of characters for imitation and avoidance. He exploits the fluidity of the Homeric paradigms, testing their usefulness as a way of understanding and interpreting different character types, and recasting their traditional attributes in the form of a new kind of hero and his opponent. Socrates' provocative personality and arguments tease and

'false-speaking' rather than 'deceptive', this kind of interpretation offers a justification of Socratic practice which is quite distinct from a defence of deception *per se* (such as we find in the *Republic*).

<sup>165</sup> This challenge is most clearly posed by Socrates' perplexity at his own conclusions (372A 6–373A 2, 376B 8–C 6) (cf. Friedländer, *Plato*, 141–2; Sprague, *PUF* 73, 78–9; Hoerber, *LHP* 128).

<sup>166</sup> This apparent lack of progress is common among Socrates' respondents, and raises the interesting question of the pedagogical effectiveness of his method, which cannot be pursued here.

<sup>167</sup> Yates, *AM* 31, who speculates that mnemonics may have played an important role in sophistic education.

challenge the intellect, while his philosophical integrity characterizes him as a model truly worthy of our emulation. Hippias, by contrast, provokes scorn for the complacency of his values and disdain for his intellectual methods. The dialogue leaves us, then, with both a challenge to the superficiality and 'common sense' instantiated by Hippias, and a philosophical protreptic embodied in the character and methods of Socrates. We cannot recapture the 'real' Socrates or Plato any more than Hippias can disinter the 'real' Homer or his characters, but we can emulate the Socratic model by embracing the dialectical method for ourselves and employing it in pursuit of wisdom and virtue.

Attention to literary character and the cultural context in which it is embedded enables us to see *Hippias Minor* as a unity where each part plays a functional role. Education emerges as the key which allows us to appreciate the functional importance not only of significant details, but of whole sections of the dialogue which have often been disregarded. The opening scene, the presence of Eudicus and the silent bystanders, Socrates' speech on Hippias' polymathy, his Homeric exegesis, and many other aspects of the dialogue take on new meaning in the light of questions of character. This approach brings out the dialogue's implications for such central issues as the cultural role of Homer, traditional and sophistic methods of education, and the democratic character type. At the same time Plato's own skill at characterization brings the embodiments of two rival pedagogical methods into dramatic confrontation. The professional success of the complacent Hippias—a living product of his own method—shows us why he constitutes a threat, and hence why Plato devotes himself to a deflation which would scarcely be justified (if Plato is to be believed) by the sophist's philosophical credentials. Socrates himself emerges both as one who tailors his elenchus to the character of others, and as a model character for our emulation. Plato's attitudes towards literary character and its place in education thus inform both his philosophical concerns and his own literary practice in a fundamental way.

*University of Washington*

# ANALYSING PLATO'S ARGUMENTS: PLATO AND PLATONISM

S. MARC COHEN AND DAVID KEYT

## 1. Introduction

DOES Plato have a philosophy? If so, what is it and how does he argue for it? Simple questions. But there are well-known obstacles standing in the way of their answer. First of all, Plato writes dialogues; and it is often unclear which character, if any, in a given dialogue speaks for Plato. Secondly, when a character in a dialogue advances a thesis, it is often unclear what the thesis is. And, finally, when a thesis is backed up by an argument, crucial premisses are often missing.

In this paper we wish to focus on this last obstacle and consider some of the issues it raises, though the other two obstacles will not go unnoticed. Suppose, then, that one has at least surmounted the first obstacle and is dealing with an argument that can reasonably be attributed to Plato himself and not just to a character in a dialogue. Suppose, further, that the argument is missing a crucial premiss. The basic issue that we shall address is the proper goal of an interpretation that supplies the missing premiss. Is the goal to divine Plato's thought or to extend it? When an interpreter supplies the missing premiss, what is he really doing? Is he expounding Plato or Platonizing? This issue arises because of the paradoxical consequences of a major principle of interpretation.

In attempting to understand a passage from a major philosopher such as Plato, Aristotle, Kant, or Wittgenstein, interpreters often seem

© S. Marc Cohen and David Keyt 1992

Earlier versions of this paper were presented to the Philosophy Department at Rutgers University and at the Mar. 1989 meeting of the Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association in Berkeley. We would like especially to thank our two commentators on the latter occasion, Gerasimos Santas and Martin Tweedale, for their helpful comments and criticisms. We also gratefully acknowledge the help of Christine Keyt, Gareth Matthews, Nicholas Smith, Charles Young, and the participants in the discussions at Rutgers and Berkeley.

to be guided by a principle of charity that directs them to put as favourable a construction as possible on the passage under consideration. And this is wise strategy. For an interpreter who ignores this principle risks missing a good, perhaps even a profound, point. If the passage under consideration contains an argument, the principle of charity says that, other things being equal, one interpretation is better than another just to the extent that the one produces a better argument than the other. Suppose, now, that the principle is applied to a philosophical text that contains an argument whose conclusion follows from its explicit premisses only by the addition of a 'tacit' or 'suppressed' premiss<sup>1</sup>—the sort of argument that traditional logic calls an *enthymeme*. Paradoxical consequences follow in six stages.

## 2. A paradox of interpretation

### (a) *First stage*

Following the principle of charity, an interpreter, when faced with a passage from a major philosopher that contains an enthymeme, will search for a suppressed premiss rather than charge the philosopher with a *non sequitur*. Ordinarily an interpreter will have an indefinite number of possible premisses to choose among. Still pursuing the principle of charity, the interpreter tries to make the most sympathetic choice among the possible premisses. Often it will be possible for an interpreter to judge that one premiss is a better choice than a second by appealing to other passages in the same work or, failing this, in other writings of the same philosopher. If there is a passage in which the one premiss is asserted by the philosopher but no passage in which the second is asserted, then in selecting a tacit premiss the one is a better choice than the other. In this case the interpreter fills the hole in the argument by extending the context of the argument. We shall call such an argument an *apparent* enthymeme. An argument with a suppressed premiss is a *real* enthymeme, on the other hand, if, and only if, the suppressed premiss cannot be supplied by extending the context.

In the case of a real enthymeme how does an interpreter choose among the various possibilities? He continues to invoke the principle

<sup>1</sup> Since two premisses can always be reduced to one by means of conjunction, no enthymeme stands in need of more than a single additional premiss.

of charity. If the proposition expressed by one possible premiss seems to the interpreter to be more reasonable than the proposition expressed by another, the interpreter, led by the principle of charity, will supply the one rather than the other. But reasonable in what sense, and to whom? One possibility is that it is reasonable for the interpreter to believe that the author of the text believed the proposition, or would have believed it had he entertained it. Such a proposition is reasonable for the interpreter *to attribute* to the author. Another possibility is that it is reasonable for the interpreter himself to believe the proposition according to his own lights. Such a proposition is reasonable for the interpreter *to hold*. Thus the proposition that the earth is shaped like a drum is a reasonable one for us to attribute to Anaximander, but not, of course, a reasonable one for us to hold.

Which sort of reasonableness is demanded in the interpretation of a real enthymeme? At first sight, it may appear that it is only the first sort—reasonableness to attribute—that is at issue. For historians are expected, aren't they, to ferret out the beliefs of the historical figures they study, not necessarily to share them? But we contend that a tacit premiss for a real enthymeme must be reasonable for the interpreter to hold. For any proposition that it is reasonable to attribute to an author is reasonable on the basis of the text or the context. But the gap in a *real* enthymeme is precisely the sort of gap that cannot be filled by an appeal to the text or context however much the context is broadened. Consequently, an interpreter here has no basis for supplying the missing premiss beyond his own sense of what it is reasonable for a rational person to hold.

Suppose two interpreters differ on the question of reasonableness. They propose competing and inconsistent interpretations of a real enthymeme.<sup>2</sup> Now, if the correctness of an interpretation were an objective fact, at most one of the interpreters could be right. But since we are dealing with a *real* enthymeme, there is no principle beyond the principle of charity to adjudicate between the two interpretations. And by hypothesis the principle of charity is unable to decide between them; each interpreter applies the principle correctly, and each prefers his own interpretation. Of course one interpreter may be an idiot and the other a Princeton professor, but the situation envisaged

<sup>2</sup> The premiss that the one supplies need not itself be inconsistent with the premiss supplied by the other. But so long as the premisses are distinct, they cannot both be the most reasonable one to supply.

often arises when both interpreters are good philosophers and equally rational. This brings us to our first conclusion:

Either there is no objectively correct interpretation of any real enthymeme found in the text of a major philosopher or else it is inaccessible to us.

(b) *Second stage*

The situation envisaged so far is this. An interpreter is analysing an argument with a suppressed premiss and considering which premiss among various competing candidates to supply. In choosing among the candidates, the principle of charity directs him to choose the most reasonable. But the interpreter may regard none of the possible premisses as reasonable to hold. This is an unstable situation in scholarship and leads to the second stage. An interpreter who is guided by the principle of charity always seeks a premiss that is reasonable to hold, and he will not regard the enthymeme as adequately interpreted until such a premiss has been found. Hence our second conclusion:

No adequately interpreted real enthymeme of a major philosopher has a *conclusion* that an interpreter will judge to be false unless it also has at least one explicit premiss that he also judges to be false.

(c) *Third stage*

In attempting to understand a passage from a major philosopher that contains a real enthymeme, it is usually necessary not only to supply a suppressed premiss but also to interpret the enthymeme's conclusion and its explicit premisses. By the principle of charity an interpreter puts as favourable a construction on a given sentence as possible. He tries to find an interpretation under which it expresses a proposition that in his judgement is close to the truth. Indeed, if a given sentence appears to express a false proposition, he will try to find an interpretation under which it expresses a true proposition.<sup>3</sup> Consequently,

<sup>3</sup> One finds an instance of this in the famous Simonides episode of Plato's *Protagoras* (339A–347A). The text that Socrates is constrained to interpret contains these lines (345 D):

an interpreter strives for an interpretation under which *all* the premisses of a real enthymeme, explicit as well as implicit, express propositions that are close to the truth. Thus we arrive at our third conclusion:

An interpreter will not regard a real enthymeme of a major philosopher as adequately interpreted until he has found a way of reading it that makes it into a good argument, that is to say, an argument that is valid and all of whose premisses, explicit and implicit, express propositions that in his judgement are close to the truth.

*(d) Fourth stage*

An interpreter's judgements about truth and reasonableness are affected, if not determined, by the philosophy that is current in his day. Thus an interpreter will always strive for a reading of a passage from a major philosopher by which the passage expresses something that would be reasonable for a contemporary philosopher to hold. Hence our fourth conclusion:

All philosophy, including that written 2,400 years ago, is contemporary philosophy. Or, phrased another way, all interpretation is anachronistic.

*(e) Fifth stage*

The foregoing conclusion can be strengthened. A charitable interpreter will undoubtedly rank Plato higher than any contemporary philosopher. Thus in interpreting Plato he will set his sights higher than the philosophy of his own day. His standard of reasonableness will be perfect reasonableness rather than that of contemporary philosophy. But such reasonableness belongs only to a god. Hence our fifth conclusion:

To a charitable interpreter every classical text is a sacred text and every classical philosopher infallible and omniscient.

---

But all who do no evil  
Voluntarily I praise and love.

Charitably refusing to attribute a false belief to the poet, Socrates construes 'voluntarily' with the words that follow rather than with those that precede.

(f) *Sixth stage*

Furthermore, there can be no discord in heaven. Charitable interpretation cannot allow for the possibility that two major philosophers might disagree. For the contrary hypothesis leads to a contradiction. Suppose that Plato and Aristotle disagree over some issue. Suppose, for example, that Aristotle claims that an idea of Plato's is false and that Plato's argument for it is invalid. Since Plato and Aristotle are both major philosophers, both must be interpreted charitably. On a charitable interpretation of Aristotle, Aristotle reads Plato correctly, and his criticism of Plato is well taken. On the other hand, on a charitable interpretation of Plato, Plato's idea is reasonable and his argument for it valid. Thus an interpreter who is interpreting Aristotle interpreting Plato and who is charitable to both Plato and Aristotle must find the very same argument both valid and invalid. This is impossible. So the original hypothesis, that it is possible for two major philosophers to disagree, must be false. Hence our sixth and final inference from the principle of charity:

Major philosophers never disagree.

This conclusion seems preposterous. But the venerable philosophical tradition of syncretism reflects the propensity of interpreters to reach the sixth stage.

### 3. An illustration: The TMA

Modern Platonic scholarship might seem far removed from syncretism. But it is not difficult to find in recent scholarship a series of discussions of a single Platonic text guided by the principle of charity that maps most of the stages of the paradox of interpretation. The recent history of the interpretation of the Third Man Argument (TMA) in Plato's *Parmenides* is one example.

The TMA, as all students of the *Parmenides* will recall, threatens the theory of Forms with an infinite regress:<sup>4</sup>

This, I suppose, is what leads you to believe that each Form is one. Whenever many things seem to you to be large, some one Form probably seems to you to

<sup>4</sup> The translation is our own.



be the same when you look at them all. So you think that largeness is one. . . . But what about largeness itself and the other large things? If you look at them all in your mind in the same way, won't some one largeness appear once again, by virtue of which they all appear large? . . . So another Form of largeness will have made an appearance, besides largeness itself and its participants. And there will be yet another over all these, by virtue of which they will all be large. So each of your Forms will no longer be one, but an infinite multitude. (*Parm.* 132A 1–B 2)

The argument is plainly an enthymeme. Its only explicit premiss is a One-Over-Many assumption:<sup>5</sup>

(OM) If a number of things are all *F*, it follows that there is a Form in virtue of which they are all *F*.

The reasoning proceeds as follows. OM is applied to an initial collection of *F* things and generates a Form of *F*-ness. The Form is then added to the initial collection, and OM is applied to this new collection, generating another Form. The new Form is added to the previous collection, and OM is applied again. The process can be repeated, *ad infinitum*.

In Gregory Vlastos's seminal article,<sup>6</sup> OM appears in the following form (p. 232):

(OM<sub>V</sub>) 'If a number of things . . . are all *F*, there must be a single Form *F*-ness, in virtue of which we apprehend [them] as all *F*.'

And as Vlastos observes, OM<sub>V</sub> alone does not entail an infinite regress of Forms. For (1) no provision has been made for the second application of OM<sub>V</sub>, and (2) nothing explicitly stated entitles us to infer that the second application of OM<sub>V</sub> generates a second Form, distinct from the one generated by the first application of OM<sub>V</sub>.

Did Vlastos dismiss the TMA as invalid? Not at all. Declaring that 'there must have been something more in Plato's mind' (p. 236) than what appears in OM<sub>V</sub>, he proposed two additional tacit premisses to

<sup>5</sup> It is almost universally assumed that Plato intended the TMA to hold for any predicate for which there is a Form; hence the schematic letter 'F' is typically used in place of 'large' to express this generality. For an interesting alternative view, see William E. Mann, 'The Third Man = The Man Who Never Was', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 16 (1979), 167–76.

<sup>6</sup> 'The Third Man Argument in the *Parmenides*', *Philosophical Review*, 63 (1954), 319–49; reprinted with an addendum in R. E. Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics* (London, 1965), 231–63. Subsequent references will be to the reprinted version.

fill in the gaps in the reasoning. To justify the second application of  $OM_V$ , Vlastos proposed a Self-Predication assumption:

( $SP_V$ ) F-ness is F.

Now when F-ness is collected together with the F things that participate in it,  $SP_V$  guarantees that they are, all of them, F. Hence, the second application of  $OM_V$  is provided for.

To justify the inference to a new Form, Vlastos proposed a Non-Identity assumption:

( $NI_V$ ) If  $x$  is F, then  $x$  cannot be identical with F-ness.

The idea is simple enough. Something which is F by virtue of participating in a Form cannot be identical to that Form. Hence the Form generated by the first application of  $OM_V$  cannot be identical to the Form generated by the second application: otherwise, it would be identical to the Form in virtue of which it is F.

A striking feature of this reconstruction, as Vlastos himself noted, is that his two tacit premisses are mutually inconsistent. (The contrapositive of  $NI_V$  says that if  $x$  is identical to F-ness, then  $x$  is not F. More simply put, this says that F-ness is not F, which is the contradictory of  $SP_V$ .) Still, he was convinced that these two assumptions had to be made for the argument to go through. So, believing that the premisses necessary to generate the regress are inconsistent, Vlastos maintained that Plato must have been unaware of them. He concluded that there is a buried inconsistency in the theory of Forms of which Plato was only dimly aware, and that the TMA is a 'record of [Plato's] honest perplexity' (p. 254).

Not surprisingly, Vlastos's article unleashed a torrent of critical response. From the first, Vlastos's critics have urged that there need be no inconsistency in the TMA's premisses. Wilfrid Sellars<sup>7</sup> advanced a reconstruction of the TMA which not only reconciled its two tacit premisses (SP and NI) but also resolved the inconsistency between them and OM. The first reconciliation was carried out by reformulating NI as a principle that denies self-participation rather than self-predication. To assert that nothing participates in itself (and, in particular, that F-ness does not participate in F-ness) does not

<sup>7</sup> 'Vlastos and "The Third Man"', *Philosophical Review*, 64 (1955), 405–37; reprinted in *Philosophical Perspectives* (Springfield, Ill., 1967), 23–54. Subsequent references will be to the reprinted version.

contradict SP. It merely entails, when conjoined with SP, that at least one F thing—namely, F-ness itself—does not participate in F-ness.

But this last proposition conflicts with OM, which entails that every F thing (including F-ness itself) participates in F-ness. So further repairs were needed to remove the inconsistency from the entire premiss-set. Sellars observed that Vlastos had used the expression 'F-ness' as if it represented a proper name of a Form, and proposed instead that 'F-ness' be taken to represent a quantifiable variable.<sup>8</sup> This simple syntactic manoeuvre removes the remaining inconsistency. Here are the TMA's premisses as Sellars formulated them:

(OM<sub>S</sub>) If a number of things are all F, it follows that there is an F-ness in virtue of which they are all F.

(SP<sub>S</sub>) All F-nesses are F.

(NI<sub>S</sub>) If *x* is F, then *x* is not identical with the F-ness by virtue of which it is F.<sup>9</sup>

These three premisses are mutually consistent; they do not entail a contradiction. But they do entail that if there are any F things at all, there is an infinite regress of F-nesses.

In response,<sup>10</sup> Vlastos conceded that his formulation of the Non-Identity assumption had been defective, and that Sellars had succeeded in 'deriv[ing] the regress by an internally consistent argument' (p. 353). But Vlastos denied that this could have been the argument that Plato intended. For where Plato's version of OM posits a *unique* form ('whenever many things seem to you to be large, some *one* form probably seems to you to be the same when you look at them all', 132A 2–3), Sellars's OM<sub>S</sub> has an ordinary existential quantifier ('there is *an* F-ness'). But throughout this context, and in numerous others,

<sup>8</sup> For further details and a more precise characterization of this revision, see S. Marc Cohen, 'The Logic of the Third Man' [LTM], *Philosophical Review*, 80 (1971), 448–75, at 452–3.

<sup>9</sup> Sellars's formulation of NI is still not quite right, as was pointed out in LTM 453, n. 14. The problem is that NI<sub>S</sub> entails (or presupposes) that there is such a thing as the (unique) F-ness by virtue of participating in which a given F thing is F. This conflicts with Plato's idea that particular Fs are F in virtue of participating in the first Form in the regress and also (along with that Form) in virtue of participating in the second Form in the regress, etc. Hence, for Plato, there will not be such a thing as the (unique) F-ness by virtue of which a given F thing is F. The correct Sellarsian formulation of NI would be this: If *x* is F, then *x* is not identical with any of the F-nesses by virtue of which it is F.

<sup>10</sup> 'Plato's "Third Man" Argument [*Parm.* 132a1–b2]; Text and Logic', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 19 (1969), 289–301. Reprinted with revisions in his *Platonic Studies*, 2nd edn. (Princeton, 1981), 342–65. Page-references will be to the revised version.

Vlastos insists, it is clear that by 'one Form' Plato means 'exactly one Form'. Concluding that OM cannot be correctly formulated without a uniqueness quantifier, Vlastos offered this revised version of the TMA's premiss-set:

- (OM<sub>v2</sub>) If any set of things share a given character, then there exists a unique Form corresponding to that character; and each of these things has that character by participating in that Form. (p. 348)
- (SP<sub>v2</sub>) The Form corresponding to a given character itself has that character. (p. 351)
- (NI<sub>v2</sub>) If anything has a given character by participating in a Form, it is not identical with that Form. (p. 351)

On this revision SP and NI are compatible, but the three axioms together are not.<sup>11</sup> For suppose there are F things. Then there is a unique Form corresponding to the character F (OM<sub>v2</sub>); but this Form is an F thing (SP<sub>v2</sub>), and so shares the character F with its own participants, and so participates in the unique Form corresponding to F (OM<sub>v2</sub>), that is, participates in itself; but this contradicts NI<sub>v2</sub>. Vlastos thus continued to maintain that the TMA's premiss-set is inconsistent.

Cohen<sup>12</sup> agreed with Vlastos that the correct formulation of OM will have a uniqueness quantifier but did not concede that this must render the premiss-set inconsistent. Just as a more careful formulation of SP and NI showed them to be consistent with one another, so a more sophisticated approach to the formulation of OM was required.

Cohen's analysis of the TMA exploits an analogy with number theory: Plato's infinite regress of Forms is analogous to the generation of the infinite sequence of natural numbers (NNs). Consider how the NNs are defined by Peano's Postulates:<sup>13</sup>

- (1) 0 is a NN.
- (2) The successor of any NN is a NN.
- (3) No two NNs have the same successor.

<sup>11</sup> Strictly speaking, the three axioms are consistent but entail that nothing has the given character. But clearly all participants in this dialogue agree that some things are large.

<sup>12</sup> LTM 448–75. Cf. n. 8 above.

<sup>13</sup> Our formulation of the Peano Postulates is due to Bertrand Russell, *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (London, 1919), 5–6.

- (4)  $o$  is not the successor of any NN.  
 (5) Any property that belongs to  $o$ , and also to the successor of every NN that has the property, belongs to all NNs.

In the usual (von Neumann) set-theoretic construction in which the NNs are represented by sets, the *successor* of a set is defined as the union of that set with its own unit set:

$$\alpha' = \alpha \cup \{\alpha\}$$

The NNs are thus represented as the members of the following infinite sequence of sets:

$$\begin{aligned} 0 &= \Lambda \\ 1 &= \Lambda \cup \{0\} \\ 2 &= \Lambda \cup \{0, 1\} \\ 3 &= \Lambda \cup \{0, 1, 2\} \\ &\text{etc.}^{14} \end{aligned}$$

Zero is identified with the empty set; the successor of zero (i.e. 1) is identified with the set whose only member is the empty set; etc. The sequence clearly satisfies the five Peano Postulates. Note that it also has the curious feature that every NN 'belongs' to every one of its 'descendants':

$$0 \in 1 \in 2 \in 3 \in \dots$$

This is a harmless side-effect of the construction in number theory, but it captures the central idea in Plato's regress.

The symbols of the foregoing sequence of equations are, of course, subject to reinterpretation. Suppose we take ' $\in$ ' to represent *participation*, rather than set-membership, ' $\Lambda$ ' to denote the set of F particulars, rather than the empty set, and ' $=$ ' to denote a one-one relation pairing a Form with the set of its participants, rather than identity. So interpreted, our formulas represent a different (but structurally identical) sequence of objects:

$$\begin{aligned} F_0 &= \Lambda \\ F_1 &= \Lambda \cup \{F_0\} \\ F_2 &= \Lambda \cup \{F_0, F_1\} \\ F_3 &= \Lambda \cup \{F_0, F_1, F_2\} \\ &\text{etc.} \end{aligned}$$

<sup>14</sup> The occurrences of ' $\Lambda \cup$ ' are redundant under the usual interpretation of  $\Lambda$  as the empty set but not under the reinterpretation to follow.

$F_0$  is the Form which has all and only F particulars as its participants;  $F_1$  is the Form whose participants are  $F_0$  and all the participants in  $F_0$ ;  $F_2$  is the Form whose participants are  $F_1$  and all the participants in  $F_1$ ; etc. Suppose finally that 'NN' denotes the set  $\{F_0, F_1, F_2, \dots\}$ , instead of the set of natural numbers.

Each of the Peano Postulates now has a familiar Form-theoretic analogue: (1) asserts that there is a Form which has (all and only) the F particulars as its participants. (2) amounts to SP (each Form by virtue of which an F thing is F is itself F). (3) has NI as a consequence.<sup>15</sup> (4) asserts that  $F_0$ , the first Form in the sequence, has only particulars as participants. (5) guarantees (although this is not obvious) that, for every  $n$ ,  $F_n$  is a member of the sequence.

The only premiss of the TMA that has no counterpart among the Peano Postulates is OM. Since OM's role is to generate a new Form at each stage of the regress, its number-theoretic counterpart is the successor function, which generates the members of the infinite sequence of NNs. If OM is to have a uniqueness quantifier, then, it will need to be based on something stronger than Plato's *over* relation, which is not a function. But we can use Plato's *over* relation to define an *immediately-over* function that corresponds to the *successor* function:<sup>16</sup>

$y$  is immediately over  $x =_{df}$   $y$  is over  $x$ , and there is no  $z$  such that  $y$  is over  $z$  and  $z$  is over  $x$ .

(That is, one Form is 'immediately over' another if no third Form intervenes between the two.<sup>17</sup>) Cohen's One-Immediately-Over-Many axiom thus guarantees that every Form has a unique 'successor':

<sup>15</sup> Recall that on the von Neumann construction, each NN is a member of all its 'descendants'; this, together with postulate 3, entails that no NN is its own successor. The Form-theoretic analogue of this is that no Form in the sequence participates in itself.

<sup>16</sup> One might object that two distinct Forms may be immediately over the same object since Socrates, for example, participates in both the Form *man* and the Form *philosopher*. But these two Forms belong to different sequences, the Third Man sequence and the Third Philosopher sequence. The *immediately-over* relation is a function only with respect to a single sequence.

<sup>17</sup> In LTM 'immediately over' was defined differently (but equivalently) in terms of the *over* relation and the notion of the *level* of an object:  $x$  is immediately over  $y$  iff the level of  $x$  is *one* greater than the level of  $y$  (whereas  $x$  is over  $y$  iff the level of  $x$  is greater than the level of  $y$ ). The notion of *level* is defined recursively in terms of participation: F things in which nothing participates (i.e. F particulars) are on level 0; F things which have as participants all and only the things on level 0 are on level 1; F things which have

(IOM-axiom) For any set of Fs, there is exactly one Form immediately over that set.

This axiom blocks self-participation, since it entails that Forms do not belong to the sets they are over. NI is thus built into IOM-axiom. SP is presupposed as well, for the values of the variables in the definition of the *immediately-over* function have been restricted to things that are F.

The regress develops as we would expect. We are given a set of Fs; IOM-axiom generates a Form they all participate in (and which is the unique Form immediately over *that set*). That Form is itself F, and we may thus obtain a new set of Fs (in the usual way) by adding the Form to the previous set. IOM-axiom is applied to the new set, generating a new Form, and so on. Assuming that the Peano Postulates are consistent, the TMA's premiss-set is thus capable of a consistent formulation, even with a 'uniqueness' quantifier in the One-Over-Many premiss.

Vlastos was clearly correct in conceding that SP and NI, properly formulated, are not incompatible; but he was mistaken in supposing that any version of OM with a uniqueness quantifier would reintroduce the inconsistency. But notice what was required to show this. Vlastos had been working in first-order logic with quantifiers ranging over particulars and Forms, whereas Cohen's reconstruction required quantifying over sets, as well.<sup>18</sup> To demonstrate the consistency of the TMA's premisses it had been necessary to employ more sophisticated logical machinery.

Let us pause for a moment to review the history of the use of the

as participants all and only the things on level  $n$  or lower are on level  $n + 1$ . The possibility of simplifying the definition of *immediate overhood* as we have done in the text was also discovered (independently) by Richard Patterson. See his *Image and Reality in Plato's Metaphysics* (Indianapolis, 1985), 54.

<sup>18</sup> Vlastos's 1981 version of the TMA (*Platonic Studies*, 2nd edn. [Princeton], 363) contains a statement of OM which appears to quantify over sets of Fs, but this appearance is misleading. His English version begins promisingly: 'If any set of things share a given character, say, *large*, then there is a unique corresponding Form, Largeness ...' But what is it to which this Form uniquely corresponds? His wording seems to suggest: corresponding to whatever set the initial quantifier picks out. That, we maintain, would be the right idea. But formalizing that idea requires a quantifier ranging over sets, and no such quantifier is to be found in Vlastos's formalization. (In English, what his formalization says is this: if  $a$ ,  $b$ , and  $c$  are all large, then this is in virtue of their participating in a Form, Largeness, the one and only Form in virtue of participating in which things are large.) And his glossary of logical symbols confirms that he intends a unique Form corresponding to a given character, as he did in  $OM_{V2}$ , where the quantification over sets was purely adventitious.

principle of charity in interpreting the TMA. In his 1954 article Vlastos used the principle of charity to convert a *non sequitur* into a valid argument, but two of the premisses in his reconstruction contradicted one another. His 1969 revision again illustrates the same use of the principle of charity, but now at a second level: he replaced this blatant inconsistency with a more subtle one—an inconsistent dyad with an inconsistent triad. Sellars,<sup>19</sup> Geach,<sup>19</sup> Strang,<sup>20</sup> Cohen, and others too numerous to mention illustrate a further use of the principle of charity: they sought to remove inconsistency altogether.

But consistency (though much preferable to inconsistency) is still a weak requirement. After all, the members of a consistent set might all be false. Our hypothesis about the use of the principle of charity would predict that scholars would next turn their attention to the truth or reasonableness of the various premisses of the TMA, and this, in fact, is what we find. In the face of a long tradition of ridiculing the Self-Predication assumption as too absurd to attribute to Plato,<sup>21</sup> Sandra Peterson published a paper entitled 'A Reasonable Self-Predication Premise for the Third Man Argument'.<sup>22</sup> In it she proposed a version of SP both plausible enough to be attributed to Plato and powerful enough to fill the gap in the TMA. The use of the principle of charity was raised to another level.

The key to Peterson's interpretation is to treat instances of SP as being akin to what she calls 'Pauline' predications. One of her standard examples of this kind of predication, appropriately enough, is the sentence 'Charity is kind'. People normally take it to express something true, she notes, even though its subject ('Charity') names an abstraction (what Plato would call a Form), and its predicate ('... is kind') seems inappropriate to such an entity. So we should not reject self-predications as absurd merely because their predicates seem inappropriate to their subjects.

What, then, do self-predications mean? Consider Pauline predications again. In saying that charity is kind, we may mean something like this: charity is a virtue that causes those who have it to be kind. Similarly, the sentence 'Justice is just' may be construed as asserting

<sup>19</sup> 'The Third Man Again', *Philosophical Review*, 65 (1956), 72–82.

<sup>20</sup> 'Plato and the Third Man', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, suppl. 37 (1963), 147–63.

<sup>21</sup> R. E. Allen and Harold Cherniss are two prominent members of this tradition. Their view will be discussed below, pp. 198–9.

<sup>22</sup> *Philosophical Review*, 82 (1973), 451–70.



(plausibly enough) that Justice is a Form which causes its participants to be just. The Form may be just in a different way from the way in which its participants are just; but this does not mean that we equivocate on 'is just' when we say that each of them is just. Peterson puts the point as follows:<sup>23</sup>

The difference between the way the F is F and the way many of its participants are F is best brought out by saying that the F is a Form which is F perhaps solely by bringing about that its participants are F. Many of its participants may be F without being able to have participants. Such categorial differences, however, do not make a difference to what it is to be F . . . (p. 470)

Hence not only can one say, without absurdity, that F-ness is F; one can also say that F-ness and its participants are all F in the same sense. That is, SP is both reasonable to hold and powerful enough to help generate the TMA.

There are, of course, degrees of reasonableness. The highest degree (at least among mortals) is that of a first-rate contemporary philosopher. So our hypothesis about the use of the principle of charity would now predict that some contemporary scholars would find such a high degree of plausibility in Plato's metaphysics. One scholar who makes a strong case for reading Plato's dialogues as a contemporary text is Terry Penner.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Penner treats Plato himself as a participant in a dialogue with Frege over contemporary issues in philosophy of language.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, historians of philosophy must also be thoroughly versed in contemporary theorizing. Penner writes:

You can't expect to do good exegesis of passages on Plato's Forms—or indeed on almost any other metaphysical topics in Plato—without making up your own mind on matters as fundamental as the nature and metaphysical pre-suppositions of logic, and the sources of the paradoxes of logic, semantics and set theory. (p. 288)

Since Plato is on the cutting edge of contemporary thought, so, too, must his interpreters be, if they are going to understand him. Penner's work thus carries us to the fourth stage of the paradox of interpretation where the distinction between historical and contemporary philosophizing breaks down altogether.

<sup>23</sup> We have made minor revisions in Peterson's notation to make it conform to our own.

<sup>24</sup> *The Ascent from Nominalism* (Dordrecht, 1987).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 57ff.

#### 4. The principle of parsimony

An interpreter who is guided solely by the principle of charity is doomed, it seems, to commit the twin sins of over-interpretation and anachronism. A second principle seems demanded to curb the excesses of the first. Charity needs to be limited by some principle of economy. One plausible candidate is the traditional principle of parsimony or simplicity. In following such a principle an interpreter seeks the simplest explanation for the text before him. Other things being equal, the simplest explanation for a writer's use of a particular sentence is that it provided the most straightforward way of expressing what he wanted to say. The simplest explanation for a missing premiss in an argument is that its author, being human, failed to notice that his argument is invalid without it. And the simplest explanation for an apparent inconsistency in a philosophical work is that the philosopher's thought actually is inconsistent.

Most interpretation involves balancing charity and parsimony. The stage is set for a use of the principle of charity whenever the evidence supporting an interpretative hypothesis underdetermines the hypothesis—that is to say, whenever the evidence is compatible with the falsity of the hypothesis. The principle of charity is used at every step from establishing a text to supplying the tacit premisses in an argument. A modern edition of the Greek text of a Platonic dialogue with its accentuation, punctuation, and separation of words is far removed from the unaccented, unpunctuated, unbroken string of capital letters actually written by Plato. Since there is often more than one way to divide an unbroken string of capitals into individual words and the words into sentences, the principle of charity must be invoked to choose among competing hypotheses. A grammatical sentence, for example, will be preferred to one that is ungrammatical; a grammatical sentence that makes sense to one that does not; and a true sentence to a false one. If the text contains an argument, the identification of its explicit premisses and its conclusion is often a matter of dispute; and once identified, these sentences are still subject to conflicting interpretations. The stage is thus set for further uses of the principle of charity.

If the paradoxical results outlined earlier are to be avoided, the principle of charity must be reined in at some point by an opposing principle of parsimony. There is, as far as we can see, no third

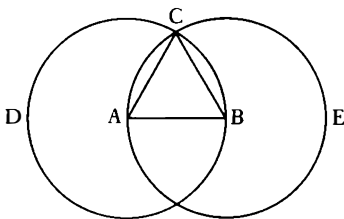
principle for determining the point where charity and parsimony are properly balanced. This is why one cannot hope for consensus among interpreters. The situation is similar to that which arises in an ethical system that tries to balance a maximizing principle (say, of utility) and a fairness principle. In both situations the balancing of the two principles involves judgement and common sense (nebulous as these are).

There is, however, a special problem when it comes to supplying the missing premiss in a real enthymeme. The simplest explanation for the missing premiss is that the author of the argument was unaware that it was needed. Once one moves beyond this explanation, the principle of parsimony loses its foothold and seems unable to provide any restraint on the principle of charity. For in interesting cases there will always be an indefinitely large number of interpretative possibilities; and since the enthymeme is real and not apparent, there is no broader context to provide a basis for choosing among them. Although an interpretation of a text is always underdetermined by the evidence, in normal cases an interpreter has at least some evidence he can appeal to in ranking one interpretative hypothesis ahead of another. In the case of a real enthymeme such evidence does not exist. The various ways of filling the gap in a real enthymeme are not simply underdetermined by the evidence—they are *hyper*-underdetermined.

## 5. An example from Euclid

It may be helpful in dealing with this problem of hyper-under-determination to contrast the interpretation of the Third Man Argument with the interpretation of a text from the closely related area of the history of mathematics. Euclid's *Elements* have been studied as closely as Plato's dialogues and present many of the same problems of interpretation. One of the major shortcomings of the *Elements* from a modern perspective is their constant use of tacit premisses. Furthermore, the Euclidean scholar is likely to be as well versed in modern mathematics as the Platonic scholar in modern philosophy. So we might expect the one to be as prone to anachronism and over-interpretation as the other. But this turns out not to be the case. Thus it may be enlightening to consider how the tools of modern mathematics are used in the interpretation of an ancient mathematical text.

The very first proof in book 1, which shows how to construct an equilateral triangle on a given finite straight line, is a good example. The proof, divided into discrete steps, runs as follows:<sup>26</sup>



- (1) Let AB be the given finite straight line.
- (2) With centre A and distance AB, let the circle BCD be described. (Postulate 3)
- (3) With centre B and distance BA, let the circle ACE be described. (Postulate 3)
- (4) The circles cut one another at point C.
- (5) From the point C to the points A and B let the straight lines CA and CB be joined. (Postulate 1)
- (6) Since the point A is the centre of the circle CDB, AC is equal to AB, (Definition 15<sup>27</sup>)
- (7) Since the point B is the centre of the circle CAE, BC is equal to BA, (Definition 15)
- (8) Therefore, AC is equal to BC. (From 6 and 7 by axiom 1<sup>28</sup>)
- (9) Hence the three straight lines AC, AB, and BC are equal to each other. (From 6, 7, and 8)
- (10) Therefore, the triangle ABC is equilateral. (Definition 20).<sup>29</sup>

An obvious flaw in this proof and one that has often been pointed out<sup>30</sup> is that no justification is given for step (4). What guarantees that

<sup>26</sup> Thomas L. Heath, *The Thirteen Books of Euclid's Elements*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, 1926), i. 241–2.

<sup>27</sup> 'A circle is a plane figure contained by one line such that all the straight lines falling upon it from one particular point among those lying within the figure are equal.'

<sup>28</sup> 'Things which are equal to the same thing are also equal to one another.'

<sup>29</sup> 'Of the three trilateral figures, an *equilateral triangle* is the one which has its three sides equal . . .'

<sup>30</sup> Heath, *Euclid's Elements*, i. 25, 242; Felix Klein, *Elementary Mathematics from an Advanced Standpoint: Geometry*, trans. E. R. Hedrick and C. A. Noble (New York, 1939), 197; Howard Eves, *A Survey of Geometry*, revised edn. (Boston, 1972), 321; Ian Mueller, *Philosophy of Mathematics and Deductive Structure in Euclid's Elements* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 28.

the two circles intersect at a point and do not slip through each other without touching? Step (4) tacitly assumes that Euclidean circles are continuous. Can this be proved? Is there anything in Euclid's postulates that ensures that Euclidean lines have no gaps?

Here are Euclid's five postulates:

1. Let it be postulated to draw a straight line from any point to any point,
2. and to produce a limited straight line in a straight line,
3. and to describe a circle with any center and distance,
4. and that all right angles are equal to one another,
5. and that, if one straight line falling on two straight lines makes the interior angles in the same direction less than two right angles, the two straight lines, if produced *ad infinitum*, meet one another in that direction in which the angles less than two right angles are.<sup>31</sup>

One way to settle the question of continuity is to see if there is an interpretation of the concepts that enter into these five postulates and into the above proof under which the postulates are true but under which step (4) is false. Such an interpretation can be found by exploiting the techniques of analytic geometry and set theory. The basic idea is to give the relevant terms an arithmetic interpretation in the domain of rational numbers. The domain of rational numbers is chosen since a line whose points correspond to rational numbers, though everywhere dense (between any two points there is a third), is not continuous. (There is a gap, for example, between all the points of such a line greater than the square root of 2 and all the points less than the square root of 2.) Following this strategy each of the relevant terms is assigned an arithmetic meaning that corresponds by way of a Cartesian (or rectangular) co-ordinate system to the intended geometric meaning of the term.

Under this arithmetic interpretation the word 'point' means 'ordered pair of rational numbers'; 'straight line' means 'set of points that satisfy an equation of the form  $ax + by + c = 0$ ', and 'circle' means 'set of points that satisfy an equation of the form  $x^2 + y^2 + ax + by + c = 0$ '. (In these equations and in those that follow 'x' and 'y' are variables and all other letters are constants.) These two equations are chosen since the graph of the first, using a Cartesian co-ordinate system, is a geometric straight line and that of the second is a geometric circle. Finally, 'line AB intersects line CD'

<sup>31</sup> Mueller's translation, *Philosophy of Mathematics*, 318–19.

means 'the intersection of the set of points identified with line AB and the set of points identified with line CD is not the null set'.

Consider now Euclid's five postulates. Postulate Four is provable,<sup>32</sup> so it can be set aside. The other four are all true under the foregoing arithmetic interpretation when it is elaborated in an obvious way.

If the points mentioned in Postulate One are the two ordered pairs  $\langle h_1, k_1 \rangle$  and  $\langle h_2, k_2 \rangle$ , the following set is the straight line through these points (where  $Ra$  is the set of rational numbers):

$$\{ \langle x, y \rangle \mid x, y \in Ra \ \& \ (k_1 - k_2)x + (h_2 - h_1)y + h_1k_2 - h_2k_1 = 0 \}.$$

Under the arithmetic interpretation Postulate One makes the true assertion that this set has members. Postulate Two makes the true assertion that if  $h_1 \neq h_2$ , then for any given rational number,  $n$ , the set contains an ordered pair whose first element is larger than  $n$  and a second ordered pair whose first element is smaller than  $n$ , and it makes a similar true assertion for the second element if  $k_1 \neq k_2$ . (If  $h_1 = h_2$ , the line is parallel to the  $y$ -axis; and if  $k_1 = k_2$ , it is parallel to the  $x$ -axis.)

In order to interpret Postulate Three it is necessary to specify that by 'any centre' is meant 'any point as centre' and by 'distance' 'distance between two points'. If this is laid down, then under the arithmetic interpretation Postulate Three makes the true assertion that the following set, which is determined by the equation for a circle with the centre  $\langle h, k \rangle$  and the radius  $r$ , is not null:

$$\{ \langle x, y \rangle \mid x, y \in Ra \ \& \ (x - h)^2 + (y - k)^2 = r^2 \}$$

(In the equation determining this set  $r^2$  must always be a rational number though  $r$  can be irrational.)

The fifth, or parallel, postulate is the most complex. Consider the two following sets:

$$A = \{ \langle x, y \rangle \mid x, y \in Ra \ \& \ a_1x + b_1y + c_1 = 0 \}$$

$$B = \{ \langle x, y \rangle \mid x, y \in Ra \ \& \ a_2x + b_2y + c_2 = 0 \}$$

Postulate Five asserts that if  $A$  and  $B$  each have at least two members and if  $a_1/a_2 \neq b_1/b_2$ , then  $A \cap B \neq \emptyset$ . This amounts to the claim that the equations that determine  $A$  and  $B$  have a simultaneous solution in the domain of rational numbers. It is established by showing that a linear equation that is satisfied by two distinct ordered pairs of

<sup>32</sup> The proof, which goes back at least to Proclus, is given in Mueller, *ibid.* 22.

rational numbers has rational coefficients<sup>33</sup> and that the simultaneous solution of two linear equations with rational coefficients must be a pair of rational numbers.<sup>34</sup>

All of Euclid's postulates are true under the proposed arithmetic interpretation, but under this interpretation the key step in Euclid's proof of his first theorem and the theorem itself are false. For suppose that  $\langle -1, 0 \rangle$  and  $\langle 1, 0 \rangle$  are the end-points of the finite straight line upon which the equilateral triangle is to be constructed. Then under the arithmetic interpretation the two circles are:

$$\begin{aligned} &\{ \langle x, y \rangle \mid x, y \in \mathbb{R} \text{ \& } (x - 1)^2 + y^2 = 2^2 \} \\ &\{ \langle x, y \rangle \mid x, y \in \mathbb{R} \text{ \& } (x + 1)^2 + y^2 = 2^2 \} \end{aligned}$$

But these sets do not intersect. (In the domain of real numbers the points of intersection are  $\langle 0, \sqrt{3} \rangle$  and  $\langle 0, -\sqrt{3} \rangle$ .) Thus Euclid's first proof cannot be repaired, and the reason is that his postulates do not guarantee that the lines of his geometry are continuous.

Euclid's geometry is in need of a continuity postulate. What form should it take? There are various possibilities of increasing levels of generality. The following postulate is sufficient to deal with the gap in Euclid's first proof:

- (1) If A is the centre of one circle and B the centre of another and if the straight line joining A and B is a radius of both circles, then the two circles cut one another at a point C.

The difficulty with this postulate is that it is too specific. Unlike Euclid's other postulates, it speaks to one case only: it guarantees that two circles have a point in common only when the circles are the same size and share a radius. It seems unlikely that Euclid would have considered it sufficiently general to deserve a place among his other postulates.

To increase generality one might try something like the following:

- (2) If one point of a circle lies inside and another point lies outside another circle, then the two circles have exactly two points in common.

<sup>33</sup> The equation for a straight line through the two points  $\langle h_1, k_1 \rangle$  and  $\langle h_2, k_2 \rangle$  is:

$$(k_1 - k_2)x + (h_2 - h_1)y + h_1k_2 - h_2k_1 = 0$$

Since  $h_1, h_2, k_1$ , and  $k_2$  are all rational, the coefficients in the equation are rational.

<sup>34</sup> A system of two linear equations can be solved by successive uses of addition and multiplication. Hence if all of the coefficients of each equation are rational, the solution must also be rational.

This postulate may still be too specific. Does it, for example, entail that a straight line that joins a point inside a circle with a point outside the circle intersects the circle at a point? A further question is whether this postulate expresses the assumption about continuity that Euclid was tacitly assuming in his first proof. Although a charitable interpretation fuses these two questions, parsimony keeps them apart. A parsimonious interpreter will point out that proposition (2) is not sufficient by itself to bridge the gap in Euclid's first proof. Before Euclid can appeal to proposition (2) he will need to establish its antecedent, a process requiring several additional steps. A charitable interpreter will need to supply these steps as well as proposition (2). Charity is getting out of hand. A simpler, more parsimonious interpretation is clearly preferable: Euclid did not notice the hole in his first proof and did not realize that his postulates do not guarantee the continuity of his lines. Although a continuity postulate and a revised proof are needed to establish Euclid's first theorem, both of these belong, not to Euclid's geometry, but to Euclidean geometry.<sup>35</sup>

By pursuing this example in such detail we have tried to show, among other things, how modern techniques can deepen one's understanding of a historical text. A scholar using the tools of modern mathematics can understand Euclid's *Elements* better than Euclid understood them himself. Thus Euclid could have discovered that his first proof is defective by noticing that no justification is offered for step (4). But an unproved proposition might still be provable. The tools of analytic geometry and model theory are needed to show that Euclid's first theorem is not provable from his postulates and why. Such insights were beyond Euclid's scope. The main point of the example, however, is that in the history of mathematics a sharp line is drawn between Euclid's geometry and Euclidean geometry, even though the latter rises on the basis of the former. The principle of parsimony seems to play a larger role in the interpretation of mathematical texts than it does in the interpretation of philosophical ones.

<sup>35</sup> In modern Euclidean geometry the continuity postulate that is favoured is Dedekind's Postulate: 'If all the points of a straight line fall into two classes, such that every point of the first class lies to the left of every point of the second class, there exists one and only one point of the line which produces this division of all points into two classes, this division of the straight line into two parts.' On the basis of this postulate the proof that the two circles of Euclid's first proof share a point C is quite elaborate. For details see Heath, *Euclid's Elements*, i. 234-40.



## 6. Two models of interpretation

When an interpreter of Plato supplies a suppressed premiss in a real enthymeme, what is his aim? There are two models. One is retrospective, the other prospective. On the retrospective model the interpreter supposes either that Plato consciously entertained the suppressed premiss but, for one reason or another, did not write it down, or that there is a premiss he would have supplied if he had been queried about the gap in his argument. The interpreter's job, on this model, is to discover the idea that was in Plato's head or the answer he would have given if the question had been put to him. Thus his interpretation is correct or incorrect depending upon whether or not the premiss he supplies corresponds to an actual or latent premiss of Plato's. On the prospective model, on the other hand, the interpreter supposes that the gap in Plato's argument reflects a gap in Plato's thinking. When the interpreter fills the gap, he considers it a free act of creation on his part. His goal is not to recapture Plato's thought (since there is no thought to recapture) but to construct as good an argument as possible on the foundation that Plato lays.

An analogy may be helpful. On the retrospective model the interpreter is like a scholar who is attempting to establish a text from a sole surviving manuscript that happens to be worm-eaten. Due to the worm-holes one of the important words in the manuscript is missing. The scholar makes a conjecture about this word. His conjecture is either true or false depending upon the word the author actually wrote. There may be a serious epistemic problem about recovering this word, but nevertheless one word is correct and all others wrong. On the prospective model, on the other hand, the interpreter is like a poet whose help is sought by a colleague having difficulty finding the right word to end a stanza of a poem he is writing. In this case the right word is the one that makes the best poem. There is no question of truth and falsity.

Both models have their place in the interpretation of Euclid. The historian of mathematics who is intent on recapturing Euclid's thought adopts the retrospective model, whereas the mathematician who repairs Euclid's proofs by supplying missing premisses adopts the prospective model. (The same person might, and often will, wear both hats.) This does not mean that the historian eschews the principle of charity, and the mathematician the principle of

parsimony. As we have already pointed out, one cannot even establish a text without using the principle of charity. Thus a retrospective interpretation will be guided by charity as well as parsimony. Similarly, parsimony as well as charity has a role in prospective interpretation. The principle of charity exhorts the interpreter to maximize validity, truth, and content. Since there is always more than one way to do this—since there is always more than a single true (or reasonable) proposition that will restore the validity of a real enthymeme—a second principle is needed to guide the choice among the candidates nominated by the principle of charity. The principle of parsimony, in exhorting the interpreter to choose the simplest, is a principle of elegance. Although the principle of parsimony plays a role in both models of interpretation, it functions differently in the two. In the prospective interpretation of a real enthymeme, the principle of parsimony guides the interpreter to the simplest, most elegant *supplement* of the text; in the retrospective interpretation of such an enthymeme, it guides him to the simplest *explanation* for the text.

It is our contention that the interpretation of Euclid provides a guide for the interpretation of Plato. The missing premisses in the real enthymemes in Plato's dialogues reflect gaps in Plato's thought just as the missing premisses in Euclid's proofs reflect gaps in his thought. And in both cases, when an interpreter supplies a missing premiss, he is extending his author's thought rather than expounding it. As the distinction between retrospective and prospective interpretation leads in the one case to the distinction between Euclid's geometry and Euclidean geometry, it leads in the other to that between Plato and Platonism.

## 7. Two objections

One objection that might be made to the prospective model of interpretation is that it presupposes that there are real gaps in Plato's arguments, that is, gaps that cannot be filled by scouring the dialogues and by increasing one's background knowledge of Greek culture. But, the objection goes, there are no such gaps. Plato did not write in a vacuum, and research will always permit a diligent scholar to isolate the premiss Plato intended his reader to supply. According to this objection, all the enthymemes in the dialogues are apparent; none is real.

But how are we to understand the claim that there are no real enthymemes in Plato? Is it a maxim of interpretation or is it a factual generalization over all the arguments in the dialogues? If it is a maxim, the objector is begging the question. For to assert as a maxim that there are no real enthymemes in Plato is simply to use the principle of charity retrospectively, and the issue is whether there are cases where such retrospective use is inappropriate. If, on the other hand, the claim that there are no real enthymemes in Plato is a generalization, it will be difficult to establish, as negative existential propositions typically are. For in each case the evidence one brings forward to fill the gap is bound to be controversial.

Suppose, for example, one attempts to support the claim that the TMA is not a real enthymeme by producing external evidence that Plato indeed subscribed to literal Self-Predication, one of the argument's implicit premisses. One might point to such a passage as *Sym.* 210E–211B, where Plato clearly asserts that the Form of Beauty is perfectly beautiful. Or, appealing to Plato's characterization of the Forms as *paradeigmata* (*Rep.* 472C 4, 484C 8, 500E 3, 540A 9, *Parm.* 132D 2, *Tim.* 29B 4, 31A 4, 39E 7, 48E 5, and elsewhere), an intrepid gap-filler might even refer beyond the dialogues to the nature of the *paradeigmata* used by Greek craftsmen. In Greek architecture they were three-dimensional full-scale models. This is how they are described in a recent book on Greek architects:

The *paradeigma* . . . was used for elements like triglyphs or capitals which required a design in three dimensions, and in cases where carved or painted decoration had to be shown. These specimens were often made of wood, stucco, or clay, even where they were to be copied in more permanent materials; but in at least one case the material was stone, for the specimen capital was to be set in place in the actual building, along with the others. In this case the specimen must obviously have been full size, and that is likely to have been normal, for the use of full-size specimens would be the easiest way of ensuring the uniformity which is so important to the effect of a Greek building.<sup>36</sup>

This practice is noteworthy because it shows that the *paradeigma* of a capital could itself be used as a capital. In some cases, at least, *paradeigmata* were literally self-predicational.

Evidence of this sort is extremely important and should be avidly sought by anyone attempting to understand Plato's dialogues. The

<sup>36</sup> J. J. Coulton, *Ancient Greek Architects at Work* (Ithaca, NY, 1977), 55.

particular evidence just cited lends a good deal of support to the claim that Plato subscribed to literal Self-Predication. But a scholar who finds the idea of literal Self-Predication absurd will not find it compelling. Such a scholar can avoid the implications of the *Symposium* passage either by denying the relevance of an earlier dialogue in interpreting the *Parmenides* (Plato changed his mind in the interval between the two dialogues) or by denying the legitimacy of inferring that Plato held that *all* Forms are literally self-predicational from the fact that he held that one Form, the Form of Beauty, is literally self-predicational.<sup>37</sup> The external evidence from Greek architecture is even easier for an opponent of literal Self-Predication to discount; for one can hold that Plato's Forms, even though described as *paradeigmata*, are only analogous to the literally self-predicational *paradeigmata* used by Greek craftsmen. All analogies break down; this analogy breaks down, one can argue, on precisely the matter of literal self-predication. So the best external evidence that we have for ascribing this tacit premiss to Plato falls short of being conclusive. Thus it will be virtually impossible to establish on the basis of either internal or external evidence that no enthymeme in Plato's dialogues is real.

A second objection that might be made to the prospective model of interpretation is that it presupposes that the arguments in Plato's dialogues are assertoric: it presupposes, that is, that Plato is attempting to establish certain theses by advancing arguments for them. But, the objection goes, this presupposition is obviously false since Plato never advances *any* thesis in his own name. Certain arguments are presented by the characters in his dialogues, but Plato never tells the reader how these arguments are to be taken. And there are various possibilities. Plato may intend the reader to take a given argument as an example of sophistry, or as an interesting intellectual experiment, or as a piece of rhetoric, or as raising an interesting problem, or as an *ad hominem*, or simply as a report of an argument current in fourth- or fifth-century Athens. The prospective model of interpretation supposes, so the objection goes, that Plato is a forerunner of Spinoza; but this is simply to misunderstand the point of writing dialogues.

The interpretation of the TMA advanced by R. E. Allen and by Harold Cherniss provides a good example of a manoeuvre that

<sup>37</sup> This second alternative is a relatively weak response since the paradox of the Third Man breaks out again with the Form of Beauty. The Third Man Argument will simply be replaced by the Third Beauty Argument. Thus this response would at most localize the paradox without eliminating it.

illustrates this last objection.<sup>38</sup> According to Allen and Cherniss, Plato deliberately presented an argument he knew to be invalid.<sup>39</sup> They hold that the TMA tacitly assumes that Largeness is large, but they also hold that this self-predicational language expresses nothing more than a trivial claim of self-identity. When Plato asserts that the Form of justice is just, for example, he is simply making the true (and trivial) assertion that justice is justice. Hence all that the tacit assumption that Largeness is large can mean for Plato (and all he is committed to) is that Largeness is Largeness. Since this premiss is too weak to generate the regress, the TMA poses no threat to Plato's theory of Forms. According to this interpretation, the TMA is an *aporia*, or perplexity, to which Plato knew the answer, not an assertoric argument indicating a flaw in the theory of Forms.<sup>40</sup>

Although strategies of this sort can be used to evade the putative conclusion of any given argument in the dialogues, it seems to us to be methodologically unsound to use them to evade the putative conclusion of *every* argument in the dialogues. To do so would be to sacrifice the idea that Plato is ever committed to any thesis that he is prepared to argue for. If Plato's philosophy is not to be thus cut off from his own expression of it, it must be conceded that at least some of Plato's arguments are assertoric. And among these it should not be too difficult to find a real enthymeme. So the prospective model is back in business.

## 8. Conclusion

Given that the prospective model of interpretation leads to Platonism rather than to Plato, the question arises whether prospective interpretation has a place in Platonic scholarship. We believe it does. For without it the interpretation of Plato is dry and barren, lacking in intelligence and imagination. Consider what a purely retrospective

<sup>38</sup> R. E. Allen, 'Participation and Predication in Plato's Middle Dialogues', in Allen, *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, 46, 59. Harold Cherniss, 'The Relation of the *Timaeus* to Plato's later Dialogues', *ibid.* 370–4. See also Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy* (New York, 1944), 294–8.

<sup>39</sup> Thus Cherniss writes: 'I take it therefore as proved not only that both versions of the regress are invalid arguments but also that when Plato put them into Parmenides' mouth he believed them to be invalid and invalid for reasons which he felt himself to have indicated satisfactorily for anyone who would compare the assumptions of these arguments with what he had already said concerning the nature of the ideas' (in Allen, *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, 374).

<sup>40</sup> See in this regard R. E. Allen, *Plato's Parmenides* (Minneapolis, 1983), 96–8.

interpretation of the TMA would amount to. It could establish no more than that the argument is a *non sequitur*. The aridity of interpretation that is purely retrospective explains, no doubt, the need for both models of interpretation in accounting for the actual practice of historians of philosophy. And this need partially explains in turn why the study of the history of philosophy is such a peculiarly philosophical enterprise. To do good work in the history of philosophy, it has often been observed, one must be a good philosopher, not just a good historian. Why this should be so is not a simple question,<sup>41</sup> but one that is much easier to answer if philosophical interpretation has a prospective as well as a retrospective component. For while he is engaged in prospective interpretation, the historian of philosophy is augmenting the philosophical work of his subject: that is, he is doing philosophy.

If a Platonic scholar needs to employ both models of interpretation, he also needs to maintain the distinction between them. Otherwise he will end up attributing his own contribution to Plato. He will end up conflating Platonism and Plato. He will be tempted, for example, in searching for the true point, meaning, or moral of a text, to discover one bestowed on the text by his own augmentation of it. Interpreters of the TMA have often succumbed to this temptation. There is no such thing as *the* moral of the TMA if, as we contend, retrospective interpretation is unable to advance beyond the observation that the TMA is a *non sequitur*.<sup>42</sup>

We suggest, finally, that Plato himself might find our view of interpretation congenial. For Plato's complaint about written words—that they do not respond to questions but repeat the same thing endlessly (*Prot.* 329A, *Phaedrus* 275D)—corresponds to our complaint about the sterility of retrospective interpretation. On the other hand, since Plato devoted so much of his life to putting words on paper, he must have hoped that this defect of writing could sometimes be alleviated. He must have hoped that his words would occasionally kindle a philosophical dialogue in the mind of an attentive reader, albeit a dialogue that the reader would have to conduct on his own or with another prospective interpreter.

*University of Washington*

<sup>41</sup> For a useful examination of this unjustly neglected question see David M. Rosenthal, 'Philosophy and its History', in Avner Cohen and Marcelo Dascal (eds.), *The Institution of Philosophy: A Discipline in Crisis?* (LaSalle, Ill., 1989).

<sup>42</sup> Unless, of course, as Cherniss and Allen maintain, the point is to present an invalid argument.

# PLATO'S ARGUMENTS AND THE DIALOGUE FORM

MICHAEL FREDE

PLATO'S dialogues are works of art. They are pieces of powerful dramatic fiction which by their art manage to give us a strong sense of what it would be like to listen to a dialectical debate or even to participate in it; they perhaps give us a stronger sense of what is involved in such a debate than we could have acquired by actually attending an ordinary dialectical discussion. For they represent paradigmatic debates between model characters in characteristic settings in a most vivid and realistic way. To this end they display an impressive mastery of a wide array of literary techniques. The dialogues put themselves into the literary tradition, by their constant allusions to earlier literature, by their constant reworking of motifs and themes of traditional literature from Homer and Hesiod down to the tragedies. Even a dialogue dealing with such abstract and prosaic material as is handled in the *Sophist* is eminently literary in this way.

At the same time, though, not only are the dialogues pieces of literary fiction, they are also, quite definitely, pieces of philosophical writing. And this raises the question of how these two aspects of Plato's writing are related. We do not want to say that they are external or accidental to each other. Obviously it is a mistake to assume that Plato wants to write literary fiction and that the philosophy contained in the dialogues just serves as a vehicle or as the raw material or, in some other way, as just the means to this end. Equally obviously it would be wrong to think that the dialogues are pieces of philosophical writing in which the literary elements just constitute a superficial adornment or embellishment which, as philosophers, we can safely disregard. For in this case it would be difficult to understand why the two elements of aspects are so firmly wedded and intertwined throughout Plato's writings. It must rather be the case that Plato

thinks that high literature cannot achieve its traditional aims without turning philosophical, or that philosophical writing, or at least the philosophical writing he is engaged in, does not serve its philosophical purpose unless it is eminently literary. Presumably Plato thinks both.

Now to say just this is much too general and too vague to be of any help. Hence, in the following, I shall focus on one particular way in which philosophy and literary form seem to me to be inseparably joined in the dialogues. The idea, just briefly, is this: Plato has certain views about the value and status of philosophical theses and philosophical arguments, as a result of which he thinks that the only responsible way to put forth such views and arguments in writing is in the form of a fictional dialogue, more precisely the kind of dramatic dialogue he writes. The matter, no doubt, is a lot more complex, but here at least is a detailed, concrete partial account of why Plato, out of philosophical consideration, writes philosophy in the form of literature. With this as a background, let us begin with a trivial observation.

In Plato's dialogues we always find, among many other things, lots of arguments. As will be clear from what I am going to say, these other things which we find are of crucial importance to the dialogues. But in what follows I want to focus on the arguments. And this for the following reasons. (1) In one's determination to do justice to the non-argumentative, 'literary', elements of the dialogue one should not overlook the plain fact that in sheer bulk the dialogues primarily consist of arguments. (2) As a rule it is an argument which forms the backbone of a dialogue and gives it its structure. (3) The very dialogue form seems in part to be due to the fact that Plato's favourite format for argumentation is the question-and-answer form. And this, I shall try to argue, is not a matter of superficial literary form, but part of the very nature of the arguments he is interested in: they are essentially dialectical. (4) The prominence of arguments in the dialogues presumably reflects the prominence arguments have in Plato's conception of philosophy. This is not to say that Plato thinks of philosophy as just a matter of inventing or discovering clever arguments. For he obviously does not. No amount of argument by itself will make one grasp the Form of the Good. But it is to say that philosophical vision and insight, in Plato's view, are also quite essentially a matter of argument. In any case, argument is a crucial ingredient of a dialogue, and, for the reasons given, I want to focus on this ingredient.

Now if we look at the arguments of the dialogues a curious problem arises. Sometimes we are confident that an argument we are dealing



with is Plato's argument, i.e. an argument Plato himself endorses. By this I mean an argument whose premisses and conclusion Plato accepts and whose premisses, he thinks, constitute a reason, perhaps even a conclusive reason, for accepting the conclusion. But there are other arguments where we are in doubt as to whether Plato endorses them. The arguments may be inconclusive or even fallacious, and we have reasons for thinking that Plato must have known that they are inconclusive or fallacious. Or the arguments rest on assumptions which we think Plato would reject. Thus the argument in the *Protagoras* that nobody does wrong knowingly is made to rest on the assumption that pleasure is the good, an assumption, we are inclined to think, Plato would reject. Hence we have some doubt, to say the least, whether Plato endorses this argument.

Now, if such doubts, if such questions, are at least legitimate, there is one thing we can infer immediately. Plato writes in such a way that it is not clear from the very form of his writing whether he endorses an argument or not. We have to look for clues, perhaps given by the dialogue itself, but perhaps not, to decide the question of whether Plato endorses an argument or not. To put the matter differently: the form of a Platonic dialogue is such that the mere fact that an argument is advanced in the dialogue does not yet mean that it is endorsed by Plato. To decide whether it is, we have to go by circumstantial evidence, by what we know about Plato's views, by clues offered by the dialogues. And this, notoriously, can be very difficult indeed.

What I have in mind may be clearer by contrast. If somebody writes a treatise in which he argues for a certain position, there is no doubt that he is endorsing the argument he advances. If there is a fallacy in the argument, we hold the author responsible for it. If he uses an assumption as a premiss which he elsewhere rejects, we think that he is inconsistent. If he uses a premiss which is false, we just think that it is a bad argument. With a philosophical treatise there is no room for the question of whether we should hold the author responsible for the fallacy, the inconsistency, the falsehood, let alone for the question of whether such flaws may be an indication that the author does not endorse the argument. If with a Platonic dialogue there is room for such questions, this must be due to their form: they are not treatises, but something else. But it would be a mistake to think that the difference I have in mind is merely due to Plato's choice of the dialogue form in general. Other philosophers have written dialogues, e.g. Aristotle, Cicero, and Augustine. And in their case there is no

problem either in identifying the arguments they endorse; for they write dialogues in such a way as to make it clear which theses and which arguments they endorse, e.g. by introducing themselves as speakers in the dialogue. So there must be something about the specific form of the Platonic dialogue which creates the problem.

This raises a series of questions. (1) Which are the formal features of the Platonic dialogue which have the effect of leaving open whether or not Plato endorses the arguments advanced in them? (2) Is this an effect intended by Plato? (3) If it is, why does Plato choose to write this way? These are the questions I want to pursue. In doing so I hope to be able to shed some light on the question of why Plato writes the kind of philosophical dialogue he does write.

Let us begin then, by looking at the formal features of the Platonic dialogue which have the effect of leaving Plato himself formally uncommitted to the arguments advanced in them, though in particular cases we may have other reasons, perhaps provided by Plato himself, for thinking that he was committed to the argument.

The most important feature here, clearly, is that the dialogue, unlike a treatise, is a piece of fiction in which the characters in the fiction are made to advance an argument. We do not, in general, hold the author of a piece of fiction responsible for the claims and the arguments made by the characters within the fiction. We do so only if the author finds some way of indicating that he himself does want to take responsibility for the claims and arguments advanced within the fiction, or at least for some of them. In the case of a dialogue, for example, the author may himself appear as one of the speakers. Or he may make it abundantly clear in some other way that he identifies himself with one of the characters in the fiction. Now one might take the view that Plato does just this. Though he does not himself appear as a speaker in his own dialogues, it is clear that his sympathies lie with the questioner of the dialogue, usually Socrates, but sometimes an obviously fictitious figure like Timaeus, the Eleatic Stranger, or the Athenian of the *Laws*. But it is at least worth noting that however much sympathy Plato may have with these figures, it is by no means clear, so clear as not to require an argument, that he fully identifies himself with them. It is not, for example, obvious to me that Plato fully identifies himself with the Socrates of the dialogues. It rather seems that however much Plato may have admired Socrates, he also had a critical distance towards him. There is very little, if anything, that we know about the real Socrates. But if we do know anything about him, it

seems that he disapproved of natural philosophy, had no interest in metaphysics, was an extreme intellectualist; these are all rather fundamental points in which Plato came to differ from Socrates. So we should not, without further argument, exclude the possibility that the dialogues reflect some criticism of Socrates, and we should not exclude the possibility that the very arguments of the dialogues in which Socrates is made to be the main speaker also reflect some of that criticism. Thus, at least formally, if not materially, there is a difference between Plato's views and the views which can be attributed to the main speaker of the dialogue.

But, be this as it may, there is a further feature of the Platonic dialogue which has the effect of making it quite unclear to what extent even the main speaker of the dialogue can be held responsible for the argument. Hence, even if Plato did completely identify himself with the main speaker, e.g. the Socrates of the dialogues, this feature would still have the effect of making it quite unclear to what extent Plato himself could be held to the argument advanced in the dialogue. The feature I have in mind is the question-and-answer format of the argument, to which I alluded earlier and which I now want to consider in more detail.

The arguments in the dialogue take the following basic form: there are two parties, a questioner and a respondent. The questioner asks a series of yes-and-no questions. After a number of such questions and answers, the questioner points out to the respondent, again in the form of a question, that given his previous answers he would seem to be committed to answering a certain further question in a certain way. Having answered the questions 'Are all men mortal?' and 'Is Socrates a man?' with 'Yes', clearly the respondent is also committed to answering 'Yes' when asked the further question whether Socrates is mortal.

Now if we consider this kind of argument by question-and-answer, just as described so far, it is not at all clear whose argument this kind of argument can be said to be. Obviously the questioner has a decisive influence on the course of the argument; for he asks the questions the answers to which will form the premisses. But equally obviously it is the respondent who gives the answers. And, within limits, though it may be left open for the moment what the limits are, the respondent may answer these questions by 'Yes' or 'No', as he chooses. But let us assume that the questioner asks these questions straightforwardly and the respondent answers them straightforwardly, namely by giving what he thinks is the correct answer to these questions. In this most

simple case, it is the respondent who is committed to the premisses, to the conclusion, and to the validity of the argument. So in this most simple case there is some sense in which the argument is the respondent's argument. I say 'some sense' because the respondent may have never thought of this argument, and even now that he is presented with it, he may be very hesitant to make it his own, though he does grant that his own answers seem to commit him to the conclusion.

But what are we to say about the questioner? Is it his argument? The questioner himself, it seems, may have no firm view, or no view at all, as to the truth of the premisses and hence as to the truth of the conclusion. This is why he is asking these questions straightforwardly. Or, perhaps he does have a view as to the truth of the matter, but he wants to hear what the respondent thinks, as if he were asking 'What do you think: are all men mortal?' But even in this case his own view of the matter does not enter into the argument at all. So, in the most straightforward case at least, the argument which emerges from such an interchange of questions and answers is not formally the questioner's argument, an argument he formally endorses. What he himself thinks about it is left quite open. At best the argument reflects the questioner's views as to how different propositions, quite independently of their truth, are logically related to each other and as to which propositions have a bearing on the question at issue. So, if we took the questions and answers straightforwardly, very little would follow from the argument as to the position of the questioner.

Now, one will object that I have underdescribed the question-and-answer format of the arguments in the dialogue. And this is quite true. I have deliberately failed to take into account that these are dialectical arguments, that their dialectical character imposes certain restrictions on their form, and that, at least at times, this has the effect that the questions and answers are not to be taken straightforwardly.

But I have underdescribed the format because sometimes it is overdescribed in a certain way, and I want to get these overdescriptions out of the way, because they obstruct our view of the facts of the matter. What we need to find is the right level for the precise identification of the features of this format of argumentation as such.

There are two overdescriptions which I want to reject. The first is this: the presentation of an argument in question-and-answer form is just a matter of presentation. To present each and every of the assumptions on which the argument rests, and to present each step of the argument, as clearly and vividly as possible, the author may

present an argument in dialogue form. And this, it is suggested, is what Plato is doing. There is, on this view, an argument which Plato endorses. He attributes it to the main speaker of the dialogue. But he makes the main speaker, his representative, present his argument in question-and-answer form, for the sake of clarity and vividness, for the sake of drama. The second kind of overdescription is this: at the end of the fifth century, and still when Plato began to write, a distinction was made between what one may call 'rhetorical argument', which would be advanced in a long continuous speech, and 'dialectical argument', which proceeds in the step-by-step way, by question and answer, which we find portrayed in the dialogues. A rhetorical argument tries to make a plausible, persuasive, convincing case for some assumption without attention to the precise logical relations between the evidence adduced and the conclusion suggested. The word 'rhetorical' nowadays might be somewhat misleading, because we associate it with oratory and, to be more precise, with the form and style, but not the substance or content, of speeches. But we have to remember that at the time 'rhetoric' covered educated continuous prose quite generally. It would thus cover not only Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*, but also Thucydides' *History*, or the pseudo-Hippocratic *On the Art of Medicine*. In any case, what matters here is that the distinction is primarily a distinction of modes of discourse, rather than one of style; and with the distinction of modes of discourse goes a distinction of modes of argument, rhetorical argumentation on the one hand, and dialectical on the other. And the dialectical mode of argumentation is closely associated with the question-and-answer format. The suggestion, then, on this second interpretation of Plato's use of the question-and-answer format, is this: Plato endorses certain arguments and wants to present them in writing. But it matters greatly to him that these are not rhetorical arguments, but closely knit, logically stringent arguments, and since the standard form for such arguments is the question-and-answer form, this is also how he presents them, namely in dialogue form.

Both these views seem to me to be fundamentally wrong; but before I explain why, I want to turn to what seems to me to be an important element of truth in the second view. The second view draws our attention to the fact that Plato, in using the question-and-answer form of argumentation in his dialogues, is either imitating or representing a long-established oral form or practice of argumentation. And it is also the case that Plato is not, or at least not primarily, interested in

rhetorical argument, but in the kind of argument in which somebody who is committed to the premisses, on pain of contradiction, also seems to be committed to the conclusion; that is, at least in most contexts, he is not content with the kind of argument to which one may respond perfectly reasonably by saying 'I grant you all this, but I am still not quite convinced.'

For the moment, though, I will pursue only the first of these two points: clearly Plato is trying to imitate or to represent an established mode of arguing by question and answer. He represents Socrates as being engaged in a kind of practice in which we know that the real Socrates and others did engage. We only have to look at the remarks the various figures in the dialogue *Protagoras* make to see that they are represented as being perfectly familiar with this kind of practice and that this practice has certain rules. It is the practice of dialectic.

We know a good amount about dialectical practice. We do not know as much as we would like about the earlier uses of this kind of argumentation in the late fifth century. But we do know a lot about dialectical practice in the first half of the fourth century BC in Plato's Academy, since most of Aristotle's *Topics* is devoted to this kind of practice. And on the basis of the *Topics*, Plato's dialogues, and a good amount of widely scattered evidence we can form a reasonably clear picture of this practice. It takes different specific forms. But common to the various forms is one general pattern. It is this: there are two parties to the debate, a questioner and a respondent. The respondent advances a claim or a thesis. It is the task of the questioner to question the respondent in such a way that the respondent by his answers commits himself to the contradictory of his original thesis. The respondent, of course, tries to avoid committing himself in his answers to any assumption which, joined with other assumptions of his, entails the contradictory of his original thesis.

This is the appropriate description of the method of argument by question and answer in general. But as we know, e.g. from Aristotle, there are various specific forms of this general pattern, various specific forms of dialectical practice. One is didactic dialectic. The respondent is ignorant of a certain truth, as he shows by making a false statement about a certain subject. The questioner, by asking him the appropriate questions, leads the respondent to see the truth concerning the matter he was initially ignorant or mistaken about.

There are some features of this kind of dialectic, i.e. didactic dialectic-

tic, which we need to dwell on for a moment. Obviously in this case the questioner comes to the situation with an argument already in hand, perhaps even a proof. And obviously an argument like this can be said to be the questioner's argument in the strong sense that it is an argument which the questioner fully endorses. The respondent has no influence on the course of the argument for the theorem. Of course, the respondent can answer each of the questions with 'Yes' or 'No'. But we also know that the questioner is not going to proceed with the argument until he has retained the right answer to each of the questions. Should he, at some point, get the wrong answer, he is just going to begin a subsidiary dialectical argument to get the right answer, the answer he needs for his main argument. In this kind of case, then, the role of the respondent is reduced to that of somebody who receives an argument which the questioner is already in possession of, and which the questioner could as well set out in continuous speech, in the form, for example, in which mathematicians present proofs. If the questioner proceeds by question and answer, it is not because the respondent has anything to contribute to the argument, but merely for didactic purposes. The questioner, with each premiss and at each step in the argument, needs to assure himself for didactic reasons that the respondent is following his reasoning, that he is learning.

Once we realize that these are the distinctive features of didactic dialectic, we also see why the two views alluded to earlier amount to overdescriptions of Plato's use of the question-and-answer format for arguments: basically they treat the arguments of the dialogues quite generally as examples of didactic dialectic. They assume that in each case Socrates, or whoever the questioner of the dialogue may be, is represented as advancing an argument he already has and espouses, because it is an argument Plato has and endorses and which Plato just puts into Socrates' mouth; an argument on the course of which the respondent has no real influence, except that, for dramatic purposes, he can be represented as stubborn or misguided and thus as making it more or less difficult for Socrates to get to the conclusion of his argument.

But this is clearly false as a general characterization of the arguments of the dialogues. It does not take into account that didactic dialectic is just one form of dialectic in general, and that, moreover, it is a form of dialectic which is scarcely, if at all, represented in the dialogues. There is at least one whole important class of dialogues which seem to represent a rather different kind of dialectical practice,

namely the aporetic dialogues. They form an important class of dialogues for several reasons. Not only are a substantial number of Plato's dialogues aporetic, so that any general account of Plato's works should fit these dialogues. It is also the case that Plato's earliest dialogues are almost invariably aporetic. Hence it seems that Plato starts out by writing dialogues of this particular kind. And this in turn suggests that at least initially his conception of writing a dialogue is very much coloured by his conception of what it is to write this particular kind of dialogue. And, finally, there is an obvious connection between this kind of dialogue and Socratic practice, the kind of dialectic the real Socrates seems to have engaged in: the aporetic dialogues clearly represent Socrates as being engaged in elenctic, rather than didactic, dialectic. They do not represent him as leading a respondent by an argument in didactic fashion to come to see the truth on some matter. They rather lead the respondent by an argument to come to see the ignorance out of which he made some claim.

Now there is a way of misunderstanding or misconstruing the Socratic elenchus, Socratic elenctic arguments, which we need to get out of the way if we want to properly understand the logical structure underlying the argument of the aporetic dialogues. Not surprisingly, Socratic elenctic dialectic has often been assimilated to didactic dialectic. This has been encouraged by the very term 'elenchus', which is generally rendered by 'refutation'. It tends to be assumed that the basic pattern of an elenchus is this: the respondent makes a claim; the questioner's task is then to refute this claim by producing an argument for, or a proof of, the truth of the contradictory of this claim, thus showing the original claim of the respondent to have been false and the respondent to have been ignorant.

But this does not accord with what we otherwise know about elenctic dialectic, and it makes nonsense of the aporetic dialogues. Obviously the aporetic dialogues are called 'aporetic' because they end in an *aporia*, in a situation in which we no longer know what to say about the question at issue, how to get out of the difficulty presented by the contradiction between the original claim and the conclusion of the ensuing argument. To be more precise, it is the respondent in the dialogue who is reduced to *aporia*. But clearly this does not make any sense if we assume that the questioner provides a proof for the contradictory claim which the respondent accepts. For in this case it is difficult to see why the respondent should be at a loss as to what to say. He may be embarrassed by the fact that he has to admit that he made a



mistake in the first place. But to be embarrassed in this way is something altogether different from being at a genuine loss as to what to say. And it is clearly the latter which the discussion in the aporetic dialogues aims at.

We can easily see how this result, this sense of being at a loss, is achieved if we properly identify the salient features of Socratic elenctic dialectic. They are the following: Socratic elenctic dialectic is supposed to test whether the respondent on a given subject-matter has any claim to authority, to knowledge, to expertise. It proceeds on the assumption that somebody who is in a privileged position to speak on a certain subject will not contradict himself on the very subject of his expertise. Surely the least we can, and need to, expect from an expert is that when we turn to him to find out the correct answer to some question we have, he does not give us an answer only to contradict it a few minutes later. A second salient feature of Socratic elenctic dialectic seems to be that the respondent has to answer the questions truthfully, i.e. according to what he actually believes to be the case. This is not to say that the respondent always obliges, or to deny that Socrates at times seems to be willing to get the respondent to contradict himself, no matter what he, the respondent, really believes. But often Socrates urges the respondent to answer what he thinks, and this seems to be the standard form, against the background of which we have to understand and explain deviations. Now in this form of dialectic, in elenctic dialectic, the questioner, to test the respondent's expertise, elicits a claim from the respondent on the subject of his supposed expertise. He does not then proceed to refute this claim, i.e. to prove this claim to be false by showing the contradictory to be true. He rather refutes the respondent, or more precisely his implicit or explicit claim to authority. And he does this in the following way. By asking the right questions, he shows that the respondent, given his own beliefs, has reason to claim exactly the opposite of what he had claimed at the outset, i.e. he shows that the respondent, given his own assumptions, is committed to the contradictory of his original thesis, and hence cannot be an expert. This does reduce the respondent to a state of *aporia* in the following way: we may assume that he had some reason, perhaps a very bad one, but a reason nevertheless, to say what he had said originally. But he has now also been shown to have reason to say exactly the opposite; hence he has reason both to affirm and to deny a certain claim; hence he does not know what to say any more. For to get out of this impasse he would have to sort out his beliefs,

both those which led to his original assertion and those which led to the contradiction. Clearly some belief needs to be discarded. But at the moment he is in no position to identify the belief, or the beliefs, which are the cause of the problem. This is what causes the *aporia*.

But if this is the correct way to look at the argument of the aporetic dialogues it is clear that, in their case at least, the question-and-answer format is not just a way of presenting an argument clearly and vividly, or didactically, an argument which could as well be presented in continuous oration. It is rather a format which is required by the *elenchus*, a format which reflects that the respondent significantly contributes to the argument. For, though again the questioner poses the questions and thus shapes the course of the argument, it is crucial for our evaluation of the argument not only that the premisses reflect the respondent's beliefs, but that for the purposes of the *elenchus* it does not matter in the least what the questioner himself knows or believes to be the truth about the subject in question. The questioner has to show that the respondent, given his own beliefs, is committed to the contradictory of his original claim. And for this purpose it does not matter at all whether the questioner believes the premisses or, for that matter, the conclusion to be true. It is not his beliefs and his authority which are under test, but the respondent's. It follows from this that, given the *elenctic* character of the aporetic dialogues, their argument is not the argument of the questioner, an argument which the questioner is portrayed as endorsing. Hence it follows that, however much and however clearly Plato may identify himself with Socrates, the questioner in these dialogues, he does not thereby commit himself in any way to the argument of these dialogues.

At least for the aporetic dialogues, then, we can say that they have certain formal features such that *formally* their argument can neither be attributed to the Socrates of the fiction, nor, *a fortiori*, to Plato himself. This is not to deny that often there are enough material clues to allow us to make some inference as to what the position of the fictitious Socrates may be, or even as to Plato's position. But the point is that such inferences have to be highly indirect, because the formal status of the arguments of these dialogues does not allow us to take these arguments directly to be Plato's arguments.

Now, there are not just aporetic dialogues with their *elenctic* dialectic. Does this mean that all the non-aporetic dialogues present us with cases of didactic dialectic? Obviously this does not follow. For it is easy to see, and we know anyway, that there are other forms of

dialectic. There are, for example, the dialectical exercises which seem to have played a major role in Plato's Academy and on which Aristotle focuses in his *Topics*. Let us call this kind of dialectic 'gymnastic dialectic'. Its basic features are these: again there is a questioner and a respondent. The respondent gets to choose a thesis from a pair of contradictory claims. With this kind of dialectic he does not have to choose the claim which he takes to be true. He might choose the one he thinks is most easy to defend, or the one he thinks it might be most interesting to try to defend. The questioner then, again, tries to elicit answers from the respondent which would commit the respondent to the contradictory of the original thesis. But with this kind of dialectic the respondent not only does not have to choose a thesis he believes in, he also does not have to answer the subsequent questions in accordance with his beliefs. He is free, within limits, to answer as he pleases. The limits are roughly these: the respondent should not give answers which have nothing to recommend them except that they will make life difficult for the questioner. Thus the respondent could not well answer the question 'Is the number three odd?' with 'No', since he would have no way to defend this answer, not even at least for a while. But he might answer the question 'Is the number one odd?' with 'No', pointing out that on some Pythagorean theory the number one is neither odd nor even. The point of this exercise is clear: over the course of time one learns how propositions are logically related to each other, which follow from which, and which are incompatible with which. One acquires an enormous store of arguments for and against any position.

But, whatever the merits of this kind of dialectical practice may be, it does not seem to be the one which we find in the dialogues. In the dialogues the respondents are at least *supposed* to speak their mind, though they do not always do so. This suggests that the non-aporetic dialogues do not just present us with examples of gymnastic dialectic. For in gymnastic dialectic the respondent is not supposed to be really committed to his answers. The non-aporetic dialogues rather seem to represent a spectrum of forms of dialectic falling between purely gymnastic dialectic, on the one hand, and didactic dialectic, on the other. It would be worth while to distinguish the various forms and their formal characteristics, and to see which consequences they have for the status of the arguments in these dialogues. Obviously the arguments of the *Phaedo* are quite different in status from the arguments of the *Timaeus* or the arguments of the second part of the

*Parmenides*. But whichever distinctions one makes, it seems sufficiently clear that the commitment of the questioner to the arguments is often rather qualified, as, for example, in the case of *Phaedo* or the *Timaeus*. Moreover, it is clear that it is always difficult to tell how committed the questioner is to the arguments. And finally we have to keep in mind that however committed the fictional questioner or respondent of the dialogue may be, nothing follows from this about the commitment of the author of the dialogue; Plato even in the least aporetic and most dogmatic dialogues remains at a radical distance from the views and arguments of the fictional character of the dialogue.

So there are a number of formal features of the Platonic dialogue which have the effect of leaving it unclear whether Plato endorses the arguments advanced in them. There is first of all the feature that a dialogue is a piece of fiction, which puts a distance between the author and the arguments and theses of the dialogue. And secondly, there is the feature of the question-and-answer format of the argument, which, except in the case of didactic dialectic, makes it impossible, or at least very difficult, to tell whether even the fictitious questioner of the dialogue is committed to the argument. This is most definitely so in the case of the aporetic dialogues, but to a greater or lesser degree it is also true of the non-aporetic dialogues. And this, for the most part, formally puts Plato at least two removes from the argument of the dialogue.

The next question, then, is whether this effect is intended. I think the answer is 'Yes'. But perhaps the best way to justify this answer is by trying to answer the third question we raised in the beginning: Why would Plato want to write in such a way as to avoid being committed to the arguments of the dialogues?

The answer to this, I think, is given indirectly by the dialogues Plato starts out writing, the aporetic dialogues. One point which these dialogues are obviously meant to impress on us is this: it is exceedingly difficult, if possible at all, to get oneself into a position in which one can speak with authority, with some kind of justified confidence, out of expertise and knowledge, about a certain subject-matter. Everybody whom Socrates actually subjects to the test fails. And we are given the impression that no matter who the respondent would be and what he would initially claim, Socrates would still manage to make him contradict himself. Why is it so difficult to pass the Socratic test? It is so difficult because for any given proposition concerning a certain

subject-matter one must know all the other propositions which, however indirectly, are logically related to it, one must know, or at least be able to tell immediately, what the logical relation is, and on the basis of this knowledge restrict oneself to exactly those beliefs within the domain of the subject-matter in question which are compatible with each other.

This would be difficult enough for any subject-matter, but, given the subject-matters Socrates and Plato are particularly interested in, a special difficulty arises. Beliefs about these subject-matters, like virtue, reality, justice, evil, do not form relatively small, isolated clusters; they form sheer endless chains which, and this is of equal importance, determine, or help to determine, our whole life and the life of the society we live in. We are brought up with them, they help to form our character and our general outlook and attitude. They help to determine where we see our interests, they shape our ambitions. To revise beliefs which are so deeply interwoven with the fabric of our life in such a way as to achieve and maintain consistency is extremely difficult, in part because it means, or at least might mean, a basic change of life.

Given that it is so difficult to pass the Socratic test, it is not surprising that Socrates himself is characterized in the dialogues as somebody who thinks that he himself is in no position to pronounce on the questions he is enquiring about. Presumably it is not too speculative to assume that the actual Socrates himself went out of his way to disclaim knowledge or expertise on these questions. And presumably it is also not too speculative to see a connection between this and the fact that Socrates is the first major philosopher in our tradition who does not write philosophical treatises. In fact, Socrates does not write at all.

But what about Plato? Did Plato think he would pass the test? I find it difficult to believe that he did. Otherwise his praise of Socratic ignorance, for example, would be difficult to understand. But Plato clearly did have views about the matters under discussion, and he had arguments for his views. Nothing prevented him from presenting these arguments, as long as the form of presentation did not make a misleading implicit claim as to their status. Writing a treatise would have amounted to such a claim, namely to the claim to speak from a position of authority. The specifically Platonic form of the dialogue, though, for the reasons given, offered Plato a way out. It allowed him to present views and arguments which in his opinion deserved closer

scrutiny and further reflection of a kind needed if one wanted to arrive at a clearer understanding of the matter at issue. Obviously one can think that certain views and arguments deserve reflection even if one does not endorse them. But the dialogue form even allowed Plato to present his own views and his own arguments without endorsing them in a way which, he thought, would not be justified. This, of course, is not to say that Plato just wrote dialogues in order to be able to present his views indirectly. It is merely to say that this is one thing their form allowed him to do, an opportunity he increasingly availed himself of.

But there is another aspect to this. We not only learn indirectly from the early dialogues what position one would have to be in to write a philosophical treatise, we also indirectly learn from them how little good a treatise, even if written from a position of knowledge, would do. To know, we learn from the early dialogues, is not just a matter of having an argument, however good it may be, for a thesis. Knowledge also involves that the rest of one's beliefs, and hence, at least in some cases, one's whole life, be in line with one's argument. For otherwise a dialectically skilled questioner will manage to reason one out of one or more of the premisses, and force one to contradict oneself. In this way knowledge, or at least a certain kind of knowledge Plato is particularly interested in, is a highly personal kind of achievement. To gain this kind of knowledge one has to sort out one's own, often rather idiosyncratic, beliefs, which are tied to one's own experience, way of life, interests, status, and the like.

I think that it is this assumption about knowledge which goes a long way to explain another formal feature of the Platonic dialogue. The Platonic dialogue quite conspicuously does not just present us with fictitious arguments in question-and-answer form. It also goes to great lengths to specify a fictitious context out of which the argument arises: it is individuals with a certain character, general outlook, a certain social position, certain interests, ambitions, and concerns, individuals in a certain situation, who enter the debate, and this background noticeably colours their views. By their artful characterization of the dramatic context of the arguments the dialogues show in an unsurpassable way how philosophy is tied to real life, to forms of life, to character and behaviour.

That knowledge is not just a matter of having the right view and the right argument for it, that it certainly is not a matter of being told what the right view and the right argument for it are, is reflected in the

dialogues by the ambiguity of the questioner's attitude towards the arguments.

From the respondent's point of view it is his own beliefs which matter. It should not matter to him what the questioner believes, if he is concerned to attain knowledge. So there is no reason why the questioner should commit himself to any beliefs, if he is solely concerned with the knowledge of the respondent. In fact, there is reason why the questioner should hide his own commitment. The respondent may adopt a belief for the wrong reason, namely on the authority of the questioner. This point, I think, deserves more elaboration than I am in a position to give it here. Socrates is represented in the dialogues as questioning false authority, the authority of tradition, the authority of the many, the authority of self-styled experts. But the point of this questioning is not just to expose the ignorance of so-called authorities. If somebody, having watched Socrates, drew the inference that he had been following the wrong authorities and needed to look for the right ones who would be in a position to tell him what to believe, he would draw the wrong inference. Socrates, clearly, at least as he is represented in Plato, would not assume this position of authority, even if he did know the answers to his questions. For, at least on these questions which matter, it is crucial that one arrive at the right view by one's own thought, rather than on the authority of somebody else, e.g. the questioner.

Now what is true of the questioner and the respondent in this regard is also true of the author and the reader. If the author's concern is for the reader's knowledge he should thwart the reader's temptation to adopt the author's views for the wrong reasons, e.g. because they are Plato's, or because Plato offers an excellent argument for them. Rather he should make sure that the reader is forced to sort out his own beliefs by pursuing the different kinds of argumentative lines which connect these beliefs in all directions, e.g. by considering the arguments of the dialogues, by trying to figure out which premiss of the elenchus the respondent should have abandoned, by working out how an appealing argument in the dialogue might be made consistent with his own beliefs, or the other way round. But precisely because Plato thinks that on these crucial questions each of us has to sort out his own beliefs to come to the correct view, and because he thinks that sorting out one's beliefs is, first of all, a matter of argument, of reasoning, more specifically of dialectical argument of its various kinds, dialectical argument plays a central role in Plato's conception of philosophy,

and this is reflected by the prominent role dialectical arguments of various kinds play in the dialogues.

There is a further dimension to all this, which I can only note in passing, though it too would deserve to be developed in detail. Notoriously Plato believes that thinking, that arriving at some view concerning some question at issue, is a matter of an internal dialogue one's reason engages in with itself (cf. *Theaet.* 189E, *Soph.* 263E). Thus, one might think, the dialectical discussion and hence the written dialogue are supposed to reflect, to be some kind of materialization of, the internal dialogue of the soul, of reason, with itself. And it is no doubt in these terms that Plato himself also thinks of dialectical argument, e.g. when he makes Socrates say that we should follow the *logos* (i.e. reason or the argument) wherever it leads. There seems to be the assumption that the questioner and the respondent share in a common rationality which itself proceeds dialectically. There is perhaps the assumption that the external dialectical debate between questioner and respondent has the following advantage over the internal dialogue of reason with itself in each of us, namely that it is more likely to be guided by rationality, in fact serves as a test of one's rationality. For though dialectical arguments by their very nature often depend on the idiosyncratic and distorted views of the participants in the debate, the form of the argument and its public character ensure an amount of rationality which is not guaranteed when the soul is left to discourse with itself. Left to itself, the soul is not only hampered by its idiosyncratic views, it is also too easily derailed in its reasoning so as to accept views which, for idiosyncratic reasons, it finds convenient to have, but which do not follow from the assumptions and in a dialectical argument would turn out to be indefensible. In fact, I suspect that it is assumed that, at least on the questions which matter, we all naturally have the right answers, but are just very confused because of all the false, mostly idiosyncratic, beliefs, incompatible with the truth, which we have also acquired. On such an assumption it is easy to see how the Socratic elenchus cannot fail to succeed in defeating the respondent as long as we are confused and have false beliefs, but also how it is supposed to lead to knowledge in the long run, if ultimately the only way to be consistent is to retain the true beliefs one has and to jettison the false beliefs one has acquired, because, for some reason or other, one cannot but have certain true beliefs, however confused one may be about them and however ready one may be also to espouse contradictory or at least incompatible beliefs.



All this is just to indicate that a complete discussion of Plato's attitude towards arguments, of his interest in dialectical argument, and of the dialogue form would also have to take into account his particular conception of reason and rationality. But to get into this is to already get into highly controversial matters of interpretation, whereas I have been trying, as far as possible, to focus on some simple, formal features of the Platonic dialogue. On these some agreement should be possible prior to, and independently of, any particular interpretation of any particular doctrinal details of Plato's dialogues.

To conclude, then: it turns out that there are a large number of reasons why Plato may have chosen to write in such a way as to leave open, or to make it very difficult to determine, whether or not he endorses a particular argument. It seems that these reasons are at the same time reasons against writing philosophical treatises, and hence offer an explanation as to why instead Plato wrote the kind of dialogue he did.

If something along these lines is true, it is clear that the dialogues are not philosophical treatises in disguise, that the dialogue form is not just a literary means to present a philosophical position and the argument for it in a clear, vivid, dramatic way. It would seem rather that the very dialogue form and the dramatic setting of the dialogue are due to philosophical, rather than superficial literary or expository considerations. The dialogues are supposed to teach us a philosophical lesson. But they are not pieces of didactic dialectic with Plato appearing in the guise of the questioner. A good part of their lesson does not consist in what gets said or argued, but in what they show, and the best part perhaps consists in the fact that they make us think about the arguments they present. For nothing but our own thought gains us knowledge.

*Oxford University*



# A MAIEUTIC VIEW OF FIVE LATE DIALOGUES

KENNETH SAYRE

## I

THERE are five dialogues of Plato's late period, each consisting of a conversation with a master philosopher, in which the conversation is organized by methodological principles explicitly proposed by the philosopher himself. In the case of the *Theaetetus*, the method was stated by Socrates in earlier dialogues, notably the *Phaedo* and book 6 of the *Republic*. In each of the remaining four, however, the method is expounded and applied within the same conversation—by the Stranger from Elea in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*, by Parmenides himself in his namesake dialogue, and by a renovated Socrates in the late *Philebus*. I shall refer to these five as the methodological dialogues.

Although details vary from context to context, the method described and its manner of application remain more or less the same throughout these five dialogues. The method in each dialogue identifies necessary and sufficient conditions for the possession of a property or for the truth of a thesis, is singled out as the correct way of philosophic enquiry, and is applied in its immediate context in a conversation between a master and a philosophic neophyte. In each case, moreover, the conversation appears essential to the application of the method; yet there is no mention of conversation in any of the descriptions. This disparity appears more puzzling the more one thinks about it.

Consider the method of collection and division, for instance, which after an elliptical description by the Stranger at *Sophist* 253 is identified as the 'business of the dialectical science', the distinguishing 'skill of the true philosopher'. We know from other passages how the method proceeds. In the definition of angling at the outset of the

dialogue, for example, it begins with a synoptic overview of relevant cases (συναγωγή 'collection') in which acquisition is isolated as a necessary feature, continues with a segregation (διαίρεσις 'division') of acquisitive arts into progressively more determinate portions, and concludes with a set of features that in combination are sufficient to distinguish angling from related forms of acquisition. If this is the method of the true 'lover of wisdom' as announced at 253E, however, we should expect it to be the method of the Stranger himself, who was introduced at the start as 'very much a philosopher' (216A). But this is not the procedure the Stranger follows. His actual procedure, rather, is first to enlist Theaetetus as a partner in conversation, which he considers preferable to solitary discourse (217C-D). He then poses questions for Theaetetus to answer, in a manner reminiscent of Socrates' procedure in the earlier dialogues. But there is one notable respect in which the present procedure differs: whereas Socratic elenchus typically ended in quandary, the Stranger's questioning leads Theaetetus to positive results. For it is Theaetetus who first remarks that angling is acquisitive (219D 4), Theaetetus who first expresses satisfaction that the definition is complete (221A 6-7, C 4), and Theaetetus who is brought to agreement with the Stranger about the name and the nature of the angler's art (221A 8-B 2).

The Stranger's procedure, in brief, is not merely to demonstrate the method himself for Theaetetus' benefit, but rather by means of the method to lead Theaetetus step by step to an understanding of angling. He induces an awareness in the talented Theaetetus that acquisition is a necessary part of angling, and that certain additional features in combination are sufficient to distinguish angling from similar practices. And this is what poses the problem. How can collection and division be the 'business of dialectical science' when it is the beginner and not the master who actually goes through the procedure? How can collection and division be the 'skill of the true philosopher' when the Stranger's contribution is the skilful use of conversation, guiding Theaetetus along this methodological path?

The same quandary is evoked by the other methodological dialogues. In each there is an explicit method for the philosopher to follow, the description of which provides no role for conversational interchange. Yet in each the method is ostensibly illustrated in a conversation between a novice and a master philosopher. In the *Statesman* young Socrates is the 'wrestling companion' (257C 9) hand-picked by the Stranger for the 'method of definition' (μεθόδω τῶν

λόγων 266D 7), and the purpose of the method they jointly employ is to make both of them 'better dialecticians' (285D 6–7). Yet in the lengthy discussion of collection and division in the middle of that dialogue there is no hint of a role for this conversational gymnastic. In the *Parmenides* the gymnastic metaphor is pressed still further. Although Socrates' approach to philosophy is noble and spirited, Parmenides observes, there is one flaw to be corrected 'lest the truth escape' him (135D 6). And this flaw can be remedied, the old master advises, only by rigorous exercise in the use of hypotheses. Socrates is accustomed to the procedure of examining consequences (necessary conditions) of hypotheses attributing existence to this or that entity; but if he would become 'thoroughly exercised' (136A 2) he must also trace the consequences (the denial of which constitutes a sufficient condition for the positive counterparts) of the negative hypotheses that identically the same entities do not exist. Agreeing reluctantly to provide an exhibition for Socrates' benefit, Parmenides then enquires as a matter of course who will answer the questions that the exercise involves. There follows a conversation between Parmenides and Aristotle—the notoriously difficult eight hypotheses—that illustrates the method to which Socrates must submit himself if he wants to have a chance 'to discern the truth' (136C 6). If the conversation is not essential to pursuit of the method, why does Parmenides require a co-operative respondent?

## II

The problem emerging is not merely why Plato wrote in dialogue form. What we want to understand specifically is how the conversational format figures in the methods of these five great dialogues. Yet if an adequate account were available of Plato's use of the dialogue form generally, it might provide insight into this particular problem.

Ryle had a general view about Plato's authorship of dialogues, according to which they were written for live performance.<sup>1</sup> Some were intended for dramatic competitions, sponsored by wealthy tyrants like Dionysius of Syracuse. Several of the later dialogues, on the other hand, where the topics are more technical, were written for the benefit of members of the Academy. In either case the dialogues

<sup>1</sup> *Plato's Progress* (London, 1966).

were to be performed before audiences. This accordingly may be labelled the 'performance' view of the dialogues.

A more circumspect variant of this view has been developed by Mitchell Miller, and elaborated in his recent book on the *Parmenides*.<sup>2</sup> While not dismissing the possibility that the dialogues were recited before audiences,<sup>3</sup> Miller stresses the dramatic playing out of the dialogue in the mind of the Academic listener or reader. In the course of this 'inward performance', Miller suggests, the 'hearer' is put 'on stage before himself'<sup>4</sup> and is enabled to benefit from the insights and mistakes alike of the characters with whom he is in effect conversing.

Miller finds a four-part structure in the dialogues generally, which he interprets as a device employed by Plato for the training of philosophers in the Academy. The basic context is an encounter between a mature philosopher and a young respondent, with whom the Academicians would supposedly identify. In the first part of the encounter, which Miller calls the 'elicitation', the philosopher draws out the respondent's position on the topic at issue. Thus in the *Parmenides*, for example, the youthful Socrates is led to articulate the theory of Forms with which he is associated as an older man in the middle dialogues. Next comes the stage of 'refutation', in which the respondent is reduced to *aporia*. In the *Parmenides* this takes the shape of the several objections raised against the early theory. The third stage is what Miller calls the 'reorienting insight', which is intended to provide the basis for resolving the *aporia*. This usually amounts to a new concept or method that has particular application to the issue at hand. Thus *Parmenides* presents Socrates with the 'training exercise' of tracing consequences from both affirmative and negative hypotheses regarding the existence of some relevant entity. The final stage is a return to the initial problem with this insight in view—a return that typically leaves the problem at least partially unresolved. But this failure, Miller argues, is a device employed by Plato to stimulate the 'listener' to think for himself about how the insight applies to the problem, and hence to 'appropriate' the insight for his own philo-

<sup>2</sup> *Plato's Parmenides: The Conversion of the Soul* (Princeton, 1986).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 190, n. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Reference to the inward participant as 'hearer' occurs on pp. 5, 8, 65, *passim*, and description of his situation as being 'on stage before himself' occurs on p. 8. In yet other passages (e.g. p. 5), Miller refers to the 'audience' of the dialogues, and to other 'figures on stage' (p. 5). Liberal use of such terminology on Miller's part, and his agreement with Ryle that certain of the dialogues at least were intended for use in the Academy (pp. 9, 10) motivate my grouping his view with Ryle's as a version of the 'performance view'.

sophic advancement. Thus, for example, the failure of Parmenides' arguments later in the dialogue to resolve the *aporiai* of the earlier refutation is supposed to inspire the philosopher-in-training to explore under his own initiative how the method applies to the theory of Forms. To the extent that the Academic 'listener' succeeds in this project, he will have increased his skill at philosophic enquiry, and Plato's purpose in writing the dialogue to this extent will have been achieved.

Persuasive as the 'performance' view may be with dialogues like the *Protagoras* and the *Phaedo*, which are equipped in effect with their own stage directions, it seems scarcely credible with regard to the late dialogues generally. For one thing, well over half of Plato's late writings (counted in terms of pages)—the *Laws*, the *Timaeus*, and the incomplete *Critias*—read more like monologues than like genuine conversations. Unless members of the intended Academic 'audience' were accustomed to something approaching our genre of the philosophic lecture, it would be hard to imagine their having the patience (or the imaginative prowess, as the case may be) to listen to these passages as purported dramatic performances. There would be difficulty even with the second part of the *Parmenides*. Miller explains what he refers to as the 'curiously passive' acceptance of the hypotheses by the young Aristotle<sup>5</sup> by conjecturing that Plato intended to 'test his hearers' with the dense character of Parmenides' discourse, and to provoke them to a greater effort than Aristotle exhibited to penetrate the surface of these opaque hypotheses. But would not the effect more likely be that the putative 'audience' of the dialogue would come to ignore young Aristotle completely, and like him become mired down in the complexity of the arguments? And in working through the arguments time after time, would it not be simply extraneous for the Academician to attempt to dramatize the passages concerned in any manner whatever? If dialogues like the *Parmenides* were used for didactic purposes within the Academy at all, it seems likely that major sections of them at least would have been scrutinized directly in written form without the conceit of a dramatic enactment.

Another difficulty for the 'performance' view of the late dialogues in particular is our lack of evidence that Plato conducted classes of any sort within the Academy, in the sense of formal meetings intended to impart particular skills or particular viewpoints to aspiring philosophers.

<sup>5</sup> Plato's *Parmenides*, 10.

Under the assumption that Plato directed sessions equivalent in function to our university classes for the training of professional philosophers, it is at least conceivable that these sessions were given over to the staging (actual or imaginative) of dialogues before captive audiences, instead of to lecturing as is our practice today. Although we know there were younger members of the Academy—Speusippus, Dion, Axiothea, and others—who well might have been there to learn from Plato, however, we have no reason to assume that they attended formal classes, or that they were subjected to training in Platonic philosophy specifically. In short, we have no clear evidence that the dialogues were even used in the Academy for specifically didactic purposes, to say nothing of being the basis of performances in the manner that either Ryle or Miller suggests.

Even if the dialogues were used in some manner for didactic purposes within the Academy, moreover, we can scarcely be convinced that this was the sole, or even the primary, purpose for which they were written. With an exception here and there, the dialogues in question are too finely crafted to have been intended merely for the instruction of the few aspiring philosophers that happened to find their way into the Academy. A vast number of readers during subsequent generations have also found them didactically forceful, and that could not have been extraneous to Plato's purposes. This subsequent readership, moreover, includes not only neophyte philosophers who might in some abstract way find themselves 'identifying' with the young lads in conversation with Socrates, or Parmenides, or the Eleatic Stranger, but also many mature philosophers who feel no personal identification with the characters at all, but who none the less are enlightened by the conversations that Plato has constructed. It is too much to believe that we who read the dialogues centuries later are mere interlopers on conversations we were never intended to overhear, and that these conversations were not written for us as much as for one small audience or another before whom they might happen to have been 'performed'. The final objection against the didactic or 'performance' view, perhaps, is that it leaves unintended and unhelped for on Plato's part the enormous effect these writings have had subsequently upon philosophically mature and neophyte readers alike. It is too much to believe that this effect was incidental to the intent of their author.



## III

Directly opposed to the 'performance' view is another perception of the conversational format that appears to be widely favoured among recent Plato scholars, or at least seems to be presumed in the way they read the dialogues. This second view is conspicuously represented in Cornford's translation of the *Parmenides*, in which Aristotle's interchange with Parmenides is simply suppressed, with the explanation that 'nothing is gained by casting the arguments into the form of question and answer'.<sup>6</sup> This is the view, in effect, that the conversational format is not essential to Plato's purposes in writing the dialogues, and that in the case of these late dialogues especially his purpose would have been served as well by a format similar to our philosophic essay—the format, for example, of the major portion of the *Timaeus*. We may refer to this as the 'proto-essay' view of the dialogues.

An integral component of this view, of course, is the assumption that the views expressed by the major expositors in the various dialogues, irony and other rhetorical devices aside, are just the views of Plato himself. That is, it is assumed that the Stranger in the *Sophist*, Parmenides in his dialogue, Socrates in the *Philebus*, and so forth, represent the views of their literary creator. Whatever spokesman Plato chooses on a given occasion, it is the argument he puts into the mouth of that figure that constitutes the dialogue's philosophic content. And if we come across an argument, say in the first part of the *Parmenides*, that falls short of the standards we think Plato should maintain, then we can contribute to Plato's cause by improving upon the argument, without concern for any effect upon the continuing conversation. In terms of Plato's contribution to subsequent philosophy, the argument is all-important and the conversation extraneous.

This view has strength where the 'performance' view falters. If the conversational format was incidental to Plato's philosophic purposes, then it would be natural for him to write monologues when the argument gets difficult—monologues that read like philosophic essays. The increasing incidence of monologue in the later dialogues would then be a natural outgrowth of their more complex argumentation. Nor is there need under this view of dubious assumptions about the

<sup>6</sup> F. M. Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides* (London, 1939), 109.

character of Plato's interactions with the young people in his Academy. Perhaps the dialogues were staged before 'classes', and perhaps they were not; but in any case they were available for people like Aristotle to read, either on his own or as part of a 'course assignment'.

None the less, there are features of the methodological dialogues that should make us wary of this view from the very start. If conversation is inessential to Plato's purposes in the *Sophist*, why does the Stranger pointedly reject the option of a 'long solitary address' (ἐπὶ σαυτοῦ μακρῷ λόγῳ 217C 3) in favour of a conversation with a tractable respondent? Why should he require a fresh respondent, when Theaetetus tires, to continue the 'joint exercise' (συγγυμνασθῆν 257C 9) pursued in the *Statesman*? And why do all parties find it natural, in their request to Parmenides, that in order to demonstrate his exercise for 'seeing the truth' (διόψεσθαι τὸ ἀληθές 136C 6) he should need the help of a co-operative respondent (137B 7-8)? Moreover, if Socrates is Plato's designated spokesman in the *Theaetetus*, why does he make such a point of being philosophically barren (150C-D)? And why is it Protarchus, rather than Socrates himself, who is to announce (66A 5) the most important consequences of their discussion of the Good at the end of the *Philebus*? These questions are not so difficult in themselves that we should despair of ever finding answers; but no answers come easily when we view the dialogues as 'proto-essays'.

A more substantial problem for this view arises with the fact that Plato time after time declines to provide his characters with the best cases he has available for the positions they are advocating. Why does Plato persist in putting weak or even bad arguments into the mouths of his major characters, as he unquestionably does? Why does he cause them to miss opportunities to produce more successful arguments? Why does he so often leave to the reader the task of reconstructing the argument upon which his case depends at crucial spots in the dialogues? If one labours under the view that the dialogues are essentially nothing more than quaint literary devices for presenting Plato's own reasoned positions on the issues, then the only explanation in sight is that argumentative lapses of these sorts resulted simply from Plato's inability to handle arguments effectively. But this explanation will not do at all. No one who has witnessed the masterful treatment of truth-functional inference in the final pages of the *Protagoras*,<sup>7</sup> for

<sup>7</sup> See my 'Propositional Logic in Plato's *Protagoras*', *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic*, 4/4 (Oct. 1963), 306-12.

instance, could harbour serious doubts about Plato's ability to construct a valid argument when he chooses to do so. And no one who has worked through the rhetorical strategy of the *Phaedo* could deny in good faith that Plato sometimes writes arguments that are deliberately faulty.

The methodological dialogues, to be sure, are marked less frequently by flatly invalid arguments than by opportunities declined for Plato to equip his characters with the best arguments available for the positions they are developing. Consider the impasse at the end of the *Theaetetus*, for example, where Socrates proposes three senses of λόγος (vocal speech, enumeration of parts, distinguishing mark) that one by one are found incapable of converting true judgement into knowledge. Anyone experienced in the Greek language knows that there are several senses of the term λόγος that show far more promise in this regard than the three actually considered. Plato certainly knew this, and knew that his typical reader would be likely to know it as well; yet for some reason he chose to end the dialogue without considering these more plausible candidates. It seems abundantly clear that Plato is not trying here to present the best case he can muster for the hypothesis that knowledge is true judgement accompanied by λόγος; what he seems to be doing instead is to stimulate the reader to mull over these other senses while Socrates takes time out to visit the King Archon.

Another clear example of a missed opportunity appears early in the *Parmenides*, when the old master browbeats the inexperienced Socrates into giving up a promising analogy of participation—that of the single day in which many events at many different places can participate—in favour of the spatial analogy of the sail, which causes considerable embarrassment for Socrates' theory. If Socrates and Parmenides had been allowed to devote their joint resources to exploring the temporal instead of the spatial analogy, the theory of Forms under attack in this part of the dialogue undoubtedly would have made a much better showing. Yet for some reason Plato chose to pursue the case least favourable to the position of his own earlier dialogues. He seems to be drawing the reader's attention to a view (arithmetically inspired?) of participation that is never explicitly developed, by pointing out the difficulties of a less promising (geometrical) view. And this is not what should be expected from a master philosopher whose main concern is to produce arguments that will win over his readers, as the 'proto-essay' view presumes.

Speculation of this sort about Plato's motives is inconclusive, of course. But there is evidence of another sort which, if taken at face value, seems actually to contradict the 'proto-essay' view of the dialogues. This evidence appears most conspicuously in the *Seventh Letter*, and in a companion passage towards the end of the *Phaedrus*. At 341C 4-6 the author of the *Seventh Letter* says quite explicitly that he has never composed a written work on the subject of philosophy. If the author was Plato, then the conclusion suggested is that Plato's dialogues were not intended to be philosophic works at all. The prima-facie unacceptability of this conclusion has encouraged many scholars to question the authenticity of the *Seventh Letter* itself, and to sift through the document for stylistic evidence of politically inspired forgery. But this way out is not reassuring. It would be contrary to the purposes of a serious forgery to misrepresent views which Plato was well known to have held; and presumably there were many people both in Athens and Syracuse who were acquainted with Plato's views on the role of the dialogue. So even if the *Seventh Letter* was not authored by Plato, there is reason to take seriously its disconcerting claim that Plato's teachings were never presented in written form.

Moreover, the *Phaedrus* makes a similar case against philosophic writing, and the authorship of this dialogue is not problematic. In the story of the invention of writing beginning at 274C, the king warns Theuth, the inventor, that his brainchild would not serve memory as he predicted, but rather would cause it to atrophy as writing replaced it. Whereupon Socrates adds his own complaint; although written words, like paintings, often seem to be alive, they are unresponsive to questioning and go on their way 'signifying the same thing for ever' (275D 9). This makes writings unsuitable for the expression especially of 'knowledge of the Just and the Fair and the Good' (276C 3). Although it is not axiomatic that Socrates is here representing Plato's views on the matter, the presumption that he is doing so goes hand in hand with the 'proto-essay' conception of the dialogues. In this regard, that conception appears self-defeating.

#### IV

A more satisfactory account of the Platonic dialogue is needed if we are to make headway on the question of how the conversational format relates to the methods of these later writings. The beginnings of such

an account can be pieced together with a closer look at the *Phaedrus* and the *Seventh Letter*.

The standard reading of these passages converts them into evidence that Plato reserved his genuine philosophic teachings for presentation in oral form—the business of the so-called ‘unwritten teachings’.<sup>8</sup> But this is the result of a superficial reading. The indictment in the *Seventh Letter* pertains not just to written work alone, but to any attempt to express true philosophic understanding in language. While writing may be most grossly deficient in this regard, any representation in the form of perceptible symbols is inadequate for the expression of true philosophy. No intelligent person, we are told at 343A, would risk putting what he understands into language—into language (λογων 343A 1) of any form, not just into writing. For the ‘knowledge that the mind seeks’ (343C 2) in pursuing philosophy cannot be expressed in language (λογω 343C 3) or other perceptible symbols. Essentially the same point is made in the *Phaedrus*, where Socrates, after the unflattering comparison of written language with painting, contends that we can make out ‘another kind of discourse’ (ἄλλον . . . λόγον 276A 1) that far exceeds the former in fittingness and power (276A 2–3). Is this the discourse, Phaedrus asks, ‘of those with mental perception’ which itself is ‘living and vital’ and of which written speech is the ‘merest image’ (276A 8–9)? Socrates replies that it is, and concludes the dialogue with the admonition that prepared speeches like those of Lysias, whether ‘spoken or written’ (λέγειν τε καὶ γράφειν 277D 2), serve at best as crutches to memory, while discourse of the sort that is really worthy is ‘inscribed in the soul’ (γραφομένοις ἐν ψυχῇ 278A 3)—the soul concerned with justice, goodness, and honour.

Both texts proscribe writing for the expression of philosophic understanding. But neither endorses oral speech as a suitable medium. A careful reading of either text, on the contrary, discloses a general disqualification of any system of perceptible symbols as a vehicle for the direct transmission of philosophic knowledge. Not only are written arguments incapable of communicating philosophy, but symbolic language in general is proclaimed unfit for the task.

But what is this alternate form of discourse, ‘inscribed in the soul’ of the true philosopher? The *Seventh Letter* is effusive in its description. What happens in the case of true philosophic knowledge is that ‘from

<sup>8</sup> K. Gaiser’s ‘Plato’s Enigmatic Lecture “On the Good”’, *Phronesis*, 25/1, (1980), 5–37, provides a helpful perspective on this topic. See also pp. 75–84 of my *Plato’s Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved* (Princeton, 1983).

repeated conversation about, and living with, the matter itself, it is suddenly generated in the soul like a torch-light kindled by a leaping flame, and straight away becomes self-sustaining' (341C 6-D 2). There are several things to note about this rather cryptic passage. For one, the fruits of philosophy are induced within the soul in a manner compared to the kindling of a torch. This image of philosophic fulfilment as an incandescence of the soul is repeated at 344B, with the avowal that 'wisdom and intelligence' (φρόνησις . . . καὶ νοῦς 344B 7-8) of 'what is true and false regarding being overall' (τὸ ψεῦδος ἅμα καὶ ἀληθὲς τῆς ὅλης οὐσίας 344B 2-3) 'shines forth' (ἐξέλαμψε 344B 7), when finally dawning, with an intensity that tests our human powers of endurance.

Another thing to note is that this state of mind is not easily achieved. It requires not only a natural affinity (340C 2, 344A 3) for philosophy, but also hard work (340C, E), persistence (340D 3), and a suitably ordered regimen (δίαίτα . . . πρέπουσα . . . κοσμία 340E 2). In addition to 'living with' (συζῆν 341D 1) the matter thus, the aspiring philosopher must engage in 'repeated conversations' (πολλῆς συνουσίας 341C 7) about his subject. At 344B this is described as a thrashing together of 'names and definitions and sense-perceptions' (ὀνόματα καὶ λόγοι . . . καὶ αἰσθήσεις 344B 5) in the context of 'friendly cross-examination' (εὐμενέσιν ἐλέγχους ἐλεγχόμενα 344B 6), and 'questioning and answering without indulgence in ill will' (ἄνευ φθόνων ἐρωτήσεσιν καὶ ἀποκρίσεσιν χρωμένων 344B 6-7). When all this has been accomplished, however, the light thereby kindled becomes self-sustaining, perhaps like that of an Olympic torch-runner, which is able to light other torches as well.

Perhaps because of doubts about its authenticity, and because of its prosaic composition, the *Seventh Letter* is ignored by many students of Plato. Yet it opens up a valuable perspective on the character of the dialogues. One thing to note in particular is that its portrayal of philosophic knowledge as a state of mind is reflected, not only in the *Phaedrus*, but in several of the later dialogues with which we are concerned. Thus the knowledge of the 'free man'—that is, of the philosopher—is identified in the *Sophist* as the ability to distinguish (διακρίνειν 253E 1-2). Forms that combine and those that do not. And the manner of reasoning recommended to the dialectician at *Philebus* 17A is what enables him to recognize (κατίδῃ 16D 8) the entire number between the one and the many—e.g. the totality of sounds by which Letter as a general Kind is differentiated in its various instantiations.

In these passages, the fruits of philosophy are represented as capacities of mental discernment, and not as arguments expressed in written or spoken language. The latter passage, indeed, even reintroduces the 'torch-lighting' image, where at 16C 7 it refers to the 'exceedingly bright fire' that accompanied the original 'gift of the gods' (16C 5) to our Pythagorean ancestors (cf. 17D), and which presumably may be passed on with the way of enquiry we inherited from them. The description of the 'gift' that follows, of course, depicts a method strikingly similar to the collection and division implicated in the conversations of the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*.

Even more striking is the parallel between the philosophic regimen in the *Seventh Letter* and the maieutic process described by Socrates in the *Theaetetus*. In comparing his art with that of his mother, Socrates recounts the case of Aristides, who, like many other youths, seeks renewal of his conversations with the 'midwife' Socrates. Accepting those whom his daemon sanctions, Socrates refers the rest to teachers like Prodicus. Those who remain are filled with difficulties (ἀπορίας 151A 6) by day and by night, greater than those of a woman in labour. In the language of the *Seventh Letter*, they 'live with the matter', 'persisting in hard work' until the time of delivery. But when the time comes they produce 'many beautiful discoveries' (πολλὰ καὶ καλὰ εὐρόντες 150D 7–8)—offspring brought to being by themselves alone, with Socrates merely assisting in the delivery (μαϊείας 150D 8). Then, in response to the midwife's questioning—the 'friendly cross-examination' of the *Seventh Letter*—the birth is tested for viability. And if what is 'generated in the soul' is proven genuine, it becomes 'self-sustaining' as the fruit of philosophy.

'Repeated conversations' are cited in the *Seventh Letter* as necessary for the training of an aspiring philosopher. The same term, συνουσία, is used twice in this passage from the *Theaetetus*; once at 150D 4, where Socrates talks of the progress favoured students make in their conversations with him, and again at 151A 2, where he speaks of Aristides returning for renewed conversations. While συνουσία commonly means one or another form of non-verbal intercourse, it is also not infrequently used by Plato as synonymous with διάλογος (e.g. *Alc. I* 114D 1, *Prot.* 310A 2, 335B 3, 5, C 1, 4, *Soph.* 217D 9, *Epin.* 991C 3). In this latter use it means 'conversation with a teacher'—i.e. conversation for didactic purposes, for philosophic training. This, of course, is the usage in the *Theaetetus*, where conversation is deemed essential for generating philosophic offspring.

But where does this leave us, the many generations of readers who are not privileged to hold repeated conversations with Socrates or Parmenides? Does this mean we are unable to learn from Plato, to grow philosophically under the influence of his dialogues? Clearly not. When the author of the *Seventh Letter* cites conversation as integral to the training of philosophers, nothing he says implies that Plato himself taught exclusively by conversing with students, or that his dialogues had no role in philosophic instruction. One way of participating repeatedly in conversations, surely, is to return time and again to the conversations put in writing by Plato. Quite literally, the dialogues are conversations with master philosophers of the sort deemed essential in the *Seventh Letter* and the *Theaetetus* for training of aspiring lovers of wisdom. And we can participate in those conversations as readily as young Dion and other members of the Academy. Perhaps some of these dialogues were performed before audiences; but surely they were read by the Academicians as well. And no more would be learnt, typically, from a staged production than from a careful reading of the written text.

When the author of the *Seventh Letter*, speaking on Plato's behalf, said that he had never composed a written work on the subject of philosophy, he did not deny the existence of the written dialogues, and he did not deny the efficacy of the dialogues in the training of young philosophers. What he denied is that the dialogues, taken by themselves as written documents, contain the final fruits of philosophic enquiry. The hubris of Dionysius was to have attempted to represent the products of his scant philosophic training in the form of a textbook. This is something neither Dionysius, nor Plato himself, nor indeed anyone else, is capable of doing. For the final fruit of a philosophic regimen is a state of mind—a 'wisdom and intelligence' (344B 7–8) that shines forth in the soul, and that cannot be captured in linguistic form. The testimony of the *Seventh Letter*, in effect, is that the dialogues as written documents do not contain philosophic wisdom, but at the same time that dialogues like these are an essential part of the regimen by which that wisdom is generated.

It is sometimes suggested, by those who believe that Plato maintained the so-called 'theory of recollection' throughout his career, that the purpose of the dialogues is to provide the same sort of elenctic purification for the reader as conversations with Socrates provided Meno, Agathon, Polus, *et al.* If knowledge is present in the soul at birth, as the story goes, but thereupon becomes obscured by false



conceptions, and if these falsehoods can be removed by Socratic questioning in order that truth might be reinstated, then those of us who cannot converse with Socrates directly might be comparably served at second hand by reading a Socratic conversation with someone whose misconceptions are similar to our own. If this theory of innate knowledge can be taken literally, then one intelligible account of why Plato wrote dialogues is that he hoped thereby to stimulate in the reader the same effect that might be achieved by direct conversation with Socrates himself.

A similar account is available to those (like myself)<sup>9</sup> who do not believe that the 'theory of recollection' persisted beyond the early Socratic dialogues. Gone is the metaphor of the soul full at birth of direct knowledge of the Forms, replaced by an equally evocative image of knowledge flaming up in the soul after long and laborious preparation. Gone too, with the critique of the 'sophist of noble lineage', is the conceit that conceptual purgation by itself is the dominant regimen on the way to philosophic understanding. But in other respects the account remains basically unchanged. Conversation with a master philosopher like Socrates (or Parmenides, or the Stranger from Elea—or Plato himself) indeed may be essential for the growth of philosophic wisdom. It is not required, however, that one respond directly to the master's questioning. The youthful Socrates surely benefited from Parmenides' discussion with Aristotle every bit as much as Theaetetus benefited from his discussion with Socrates. It is not even necessary, moreover, actually to be present at the scene of the conversation. Indeed, direct participation in the discussion may not even be the best course available. The Socrates of the dialogues who achieves such remarkable results with Theaetetus, after all, in that respect is Plato's creation. Active participation as readers in conversations artfully constructed by the master dialogician is perhaps even better philosophic training than exposure to the spontaneous questions, however inspired, of Socrates or any other actual person. It is certainly possible that we as readers are better served by Plato's art than were most respondents in conversations with the historical Socrates.

Since this view of the purpose of the dialogue form is shaped by Socrates' description of his role as a philosophic midwife, let us call it the 'maieutic' view of the dialogues. The view is not that all of Plato's

<sup>9</sup> See *Plato's Late Ontology*, 188–93; also 'Reply to Moline', in C. L. Griswold (ed.), *Platonic Writings/Platonic Readings* (New York, 1988), 240–6.

dialogues were written with this purpose expressly at hand. It remains an open question whether the *Meno*, along with other early dialogues, was composed with something like the 'theory of recollection' in mind. And it remains a distinct possibility that certain late dialogues, notably the *Timaeus* and the *Critias*, were intended more as 'position papers' than as aids to philosophic illumination (they are, after all, about topics that Plato seems to have considered accessible to opinion but not to knowledge). This view therefore finds no difficulty with the tendency towards monologue exhibited in some of the late writings. It can even admit that Cornford was at least partially justified in dropping Aristotle's responses from his translation of the *Parmenides*. Although the *Parmenides* overall certainly exercises maieutic powers upon the receptive reader, this effect seems to come primarily from the interplay between Parmenides and Socrates. Whatever more esoteric role Plato may have intended for Aristotle's brief responses,<sup>10</sup> they serve the useful function of breaking Parmenides' discourse up into manageable segments; and Cornford can accomplish this with his own notational devices.

Nor is the 'maieutic' view discomfited by the fact that Plato often fails, in the methodological dialogues, to present the best case for the position he presumably favours. The striking omission at the end of the *Theaetetus* of any of several available senses of λόγος that might plausibly be thought to make the difference between knowledge and true opinion, according to this view, is just what it appears to be—an invitation to the reader to anticipate these other senses, and to consider for himself how they might contribute to the argument. And the pre-emptive move of Parmenides, in his namesake dialogue, of substituting a spatial for a temporal analogue of participation may be construed as an inducement for the reader to mull over the ramifications of the temporal model, in preparation for the issues raised by temporality in the second part of the dialogue (155E–157B).

Thus the 'maieutic' conception of the methodological dialogues is not affected by the difficulties that appear most damaging against the alternative views previously discussed. What, then, of the other question with which this discussion began, of how the methods described and illustrated in the methodological dialogues relate to the conversational format in which these writings are cast? If these dialogues were intended primarily to serve a maieutic purpose, in the

<sup>10</sup> For one suggestion, see R. S. Brumbaugh, *Plato on the One: The Hypotheses in the Parmenides* (New Haven, 1961).

manner outlined above, how do their methodological features contribute to this intended effect?

## V

The *Theaetetus* proceeds step by step according to the method described by Socrates at *Phaedo* 101E 3 as the right way to 'discover anything about reality'. By the end, Theaetetus is well on his way towards a definition of knowledge, a goal completed in his subsequent conversation with the Stranger from Elea. In the *Sophist*, the Stranger conducts Theaetetus through a definition of truth and falsehood, leading finally to a definition of sophistry that exhibits conditions both adequate and necessary for being an instance of that Kind. Along the way, the Stranger reveals to Theaetetus the character of the method by which these results are accomplished—a collection of features necessary in any such instance, and a division in terms sufficient to distinguish that Kind. In the *Statesman*, the method of collection and division is relaxed to allow other than dichotomous division, and is augmented by explicit use of examples or paradigms. The result in this dialogue is a definition of the combinatory art of statecraft, enriched by comparison with the art of weaving. The final dialogue organized by application of this method is the *Philebus*, which culminates with an explication of the Good itself. Introduced in this context as a manner of discourse (16A 8–B 1) with which Socrates has always been enamoured, the method is integrated with the ontology of Limit and Unlimited, upon which the discussion of the rest of the dialogue is based. The conversation with Aristotle in the *Parmenides*, on the other hand, reverts explicitly to a version of the method of hypothesis, but one in which negative hypotheses are treated as well as affirmative. Whereas tracing the consequences of affirmative hypotheses reveals necessary conditions for a thing's existence, the consequences of negative hypotheses produce conditions the denials of which are correspondingly sufficient. In the course of pursuing this method in the second part of his namesake dialogue, *Parmenides* discloses startling results both for Eleaticism and for the early theory of Forms.

The tendency of most contemporary philosophers in reacting to these various methodological descriptions, it seems fair to say, is to think of them quite straightforwardly as recommending procedures or

techniques for producing definitions or for explicating concepts. While different dialogues present slightly different versions, each is a method for arriving at necessary and sufficient conditions—either for the truth of a proposition or for the existence of some kind of entity. Difference in procedure from dialogue to dialogue may be attributed to difference in subject-matter, or perhaps to a developing awareness on Plato's part of the requirements of an adequate definition. According to this way of thinking, in any case, the technique of explication in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions is one that can be employed just as well in composing philosophic essays, and has nothing essentially to do with the dialogue form.

What this prevailing conception of Plato's methodology fails to account for, however, is the fact that in most of the dialogues concerned the person primarily responsible for applying the method—Socrates, Parmenides, the Eleatic Stranger—is quite explicit about declining to apply it in any other than a conversational context. If the 'maieutic' view of the dialogues is basically correct, a different story must be told about the relation between dialogue form and philosophic method. What can this view offer in place of the prevailing conception?

The answer to be proposed takes shape in two parts. First, we must draw upon our personal experiences in reading Plato, and consider what might be called the 'dynamism' of the typical dialogue. Even inexperienced readers of the *Theaetetus*, for example, often seem to sense a 'movement' from hypothesis to hypothesis—a kind of momentum building up as the discussion progresses. This sense is even more distinct with readers who are familiar with the great images at the centre of the *Republic*. Theaetetus' search for knowledge begins at the bottom of the Line, with the hypothesis that knowledge is nothing but sense-perception. Socrates' criticism then leads to the next highest level, with the proposal that knowledge is true judgement or opinion. The third hypothesis adds λόγος to true opinion. If a sense of λόγος were provided equivalent to *thought* or *reason*—like that contrasted with μῦθος in the *Timaeus* (29A 7, 29D 1), for example—then Theaetetus and we as readers alike would have been ushered into the higher reaches of the Divided Line. But Plato declines to incorporate this further step into the dialogue, and instead has Socrates retire to the scene of his indictment. None the less, the momentum built up by this point in the dialogue seems actually to propel the prepared reader in this upward direction, generating an active anticipation of the more

adequate treatment of λόγος to be found in the *Sophist*. It is not idle to speculate that the appearance of the sun in the final pages of the dialogue is to remind the reader of the Good that makes knowledge possible, and of the light that greets the prisoner on emerging from the Cave.

In addition to the 'horizontal' movement carrying the reader through the conversation in its stage-wise progression, that is to say, there is a 'vertical' impetus inducing the serious reader to look more and more intently beneath the surface of the dialogue. As any experienced reader of Plato must know, there are certain dialogues that invite always another careful reading, regardless of how often one has read them before. The master-works of Plato, like those of Beethoven or Dostoevsky, seem always to reward a repeated encounter. The sense one comes to have with Plato is that the more one discovers in the infrastructure of the conversation, the better one is equipped for yet further discoveries. By moving back and forth between Parmenides' description of the exercise that will make Socrates a mature philosopher, for example, and his exhibition of that exercise in his ensuing dialogue with Aristotle, one builds up a better understanding not only of the method itself but also of the content of the eight hypotheses. What one discovers during a given reading, as it were, sets up expectations of what to look for upon subsequent readings, producing a sense of penetration to ever deeper levels of philosophic content.

Whatever one makes of these common experiences, the fact remains that Plato's dialogues have some kind of intrinsic power to elicit the active involvement of an attentive reader. The reader engages in the flow of the developing argument, and learns more about its topic with each repeated engagement. Perhaps we should expect this from any well-written discourse. But the dynamism of these particular dialogues is something exceptional. By whatever wit and philosophic cunning, the conversations written in the methodological dialogues are capable quite literally of stimulating the growth of philosophic understanding.

But if these conversations are capable, as the *Seventh Letter* puts it, of 'kindling' the flame of understanding when 'lived with' persistently, then what is the role of the various methods that the dialogues feature? The response is that the momentum communicated by the dialogue to the mind of the reader must be paced and aimed in the right direction, must be properly regulated—in the language of the *Seventh Letter*,

must be 'suitably ordered'. The second part of the answer to the question here being addressed is that the method is part of the discipline by which this regulation is imposed.

In what sense can a method regulate the course of a conversation? Consider the conversation between young Socrates and the Eleatic Stranger, with regard to the method pursued in the *Statesman*. Young Socrates is put on notice at the beginning of the dialogue (258B) that the procedure to be followed in defining the statesman will be the same as that followed in the *Sophist* preceding. Although the Stranger allows that dichotomous division might not always be possible (287C), the basic method (μέθοδον 286D 9) remains that of 'dividing among Forms' (κατ' εἶδη . . . διαίρειν 286D 9-E 1). After a series of false starts and misdirections, obviously intended to indicate how the method can miscarry, the participants have assembled the major components of a credible definition by 277A, and commit the remainder of their conversation to an examination of procedures and to working out details. It is all too easy for us to view the resulting definition as a structure of interlocking terms or concepts, something like a biological phylum that can be diagrammatically represented in the form of an 'inverse tree'. And it is all too easy, accordingly, to think of the method pursued jointly by the Stranger and his respondent as little more than a prescription that in our times might be served by the technique of seeking counter-examples to test the adequacy of proposed definitions.

But the method of the *Statesman* is more than this. As a 'method of definition' (μεθόδῳ τῶν λόγων 266D 7), to be sure, it is aimed in this dialogue towards a definition of statecraft, as in the previous dialogue it is aimed at a definition of sophistry. And to be sure, the results of the method, properly pursued, are explications in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. But the method is not merely the principle that these are results of the type we should want to accomplish—not merely a prescription for a set of necessary and sufficient conditions, to be filled in whatever manner we find expedient. The method is a prescription, rather, of a certain way in which the definition in question is to be pursued. And the way involves a conversation between two willing participants, carefully orchestrated to lead them to the desired results. The method of the *Statesman*, in brief, dictates the trajectory of the conversation, and does so by directing the dialogue along a path that leads to λόγος. And the path to λόγος, of course, is the path of knowledge.

It may be instructive to note that, immediately after remarking at 266D that the μέθοδος τῶν λόγων is indifferent to the status of the object being defined, the Stranger alludes to the relative length of the path (ὁδόν 266E 1; cf. 265A 2) leading to the definition. Inasmuch as the term μέθοδος is a compound of μετά and ὁδός, it has a root meaning roughly equivalent to 'a following after' or 'pursuit of a way'. Indeed, there are passages in the dialogues where Plato employs ὁδός in a sense apparently synonymous with μέθοδος. At *Rep.* 532E 2, for example, there is mention of the ὁδός of dialectic, followed at 533C 9 by a description of the same process as ἡ διαλεκτικὴ μέθοδος. In the *Phaedrus*, again, Socrates refers to the 'path of division' (ὁδῷ διηρηθῆναι 263B 7), a clear allusion to the 'collections and divisions' explicitly cited at 266B. Collection and division, of course, comprise the method pursued in the *Sophist*, the *Statesman*, and, with certain amendments, the late *Philebus*. In the *Philebus* this method is praised extravagantly as 'a gift of the gods' and further described as the ὁδόν (16A 8) to which Socrates has always been devoted, and the ὁδός (16B 5) responsible for all discoveries involving skill. Like these other dialogues, the *Philebus*, with its own peculiar nuances, is a conversation structured according to the requirements of this way.

One fashion in which the method structures the conversation, accordingly, is in directing it towards a prescribed outcome; in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman* towards a definition, and in the *Philebus* towards an exposition of the human goods. Beyond this, the method establishes priorities among the topics involved in this outcome, and hence orders the sequence in which they come up for discussion. In the *Sophist*, for example, it dictates that *not-being* should be treated before *truth* and *falsehood*, which in turn must be subjected to explication before the final definition of sophistry that completes the dialogue. Moreover, the method provides room along the way for faulty applications, if these might be instructive to the respondent or to the reader. Thus it is an integral part of the method of hypothesis, as pursued in the *Theaetetus*, to entertain several tentative definitions of *falsehood* and of λόγος, in order to teach us the requirements of a successful definition.

Most important, however, is the method's role in bringing a complex set of issues before the reader's critical attention, in a manner promoting an awareness of what is required for their resolution. By guiding the readers' approach to the conversation, the method enables him or her to grasp its contours and its general direction, and thereby

to anticipate the order in which the issues are treated and to grasp the significance of their interrelationships. A by-product may be the formulation of an explicit definition, as when the Stranger helps Theaetetus in the early pages of the *Sophist* to list the features distinctive of the practice of angling. But this is only a by-product. The primary role of the method, properly pursued, is to induce awareness of such features in the mind of the reader, and to produce conviction that these features are part of the nature of the Form or Kind to which the conversation is dedicated. It is no incidental gesture on the Stranger's part when, in pulling together the threads towards the end of the *Sophist*, he elects to forgo further argument for the divine origin of the natural world because he sees that Theaetetus' nature (τὴν φύσιν 265D 8) will come to this persuasion on its own without further prompting. For to reach persuasion of this sort on the basis of a noetic perception of reality is the sum and substance of philosophic understanding. The goal of philosophy is not argument, but mental discernment.

## VI

In depicting the fruits of philosophy as a light generated in the mind of a well-disciplined enquirer, the author of the *Seventh Letter* is in effect continuing a series of images for the internal origins of knowledge, reaching back to the *Phaedo* and the *Meno*. In these earlier contexts, the image is that of knowledge present in the soul at birth, to be refurbished in the course of Socratic conversations. In the *Republic* the image shifts to one of ascent from a cave, with questioning (515D 5) to aid in the mind's conversion from an awareness of shadows to a comprehension of reality. A further shift occurs in the *Theaetetus*, where conversation with Socrates is supposed to function maieutically in the delivery of conceptions produced within the minds of his patients. The last image in the sequence is the Promethean fire (16C 6–7) of the *Philebus*, which of course is the one further embellished in the *Seventh Letter*. Here conversation prepares the mind for a flame-like revelation of the understanding sought by those who would know the true reality (342B 1). What remains constant throughout this series of exceptionally memorable images is the view that conversation with a master philosopher is an essential propaedeutic for the generation of philosophic understanding, and that this understanding, however



reached, is a state of awareness within the mind of the true lover of wisdom.

I have made two claims concerning the methodological dialogues. The first is that the conversational format of these dialogues is intended to serve the maieutic function described by Socrates in the *Theaetetus*, and characterized in the *Seventh Letter* as the only path to the flame-like revelation of philosophic knowledge. The second is that the respective methods of these conversations provide the structure by which they are enabled to lead the reader to that state of fulfilment.

The first claim is supported by the texts involved, the second by the experience of the attentive reader. Neither claim by itself, perhaps, is particularly adventuresome. I have suggested further, however, that together these claims answer the question posed at the beginning of this discussion: namely, how the conversational format of these five late dialogues relates to the methods they severally illustrate. The answer, in summary, is that the method in each case provides the discipline by which the reader is enabled to follow the path of the conversation, to the state of wisdom that can be found at its end.

So my two claims in context are more substantial. For they amount to a view about how these particular dialogues should be read—a view, I have argued, that is distinctly superior to either the ‘performance’ or the ‘proto-essay’ views examined previously. And one thing all students of Plato can agree upon, regardless of how they read the dialogues, is that the view one adopts in this regard exerts a very substantial influence on the character of the scholarship that the reading produces.

*University of Notre Dame*



# EDITOR'S AFTERWORD: PLATONIC SCHOLARS AND OTHER WISHFUL THINKERS

NICHOLAS D. SMITH

## 1. Why are there scholars?

No doubt anyone reading this collection has, at some time or other and in some form or other, been asked the following question: How on earth could there be anything more to say about philosophers who have been studied ceaselessly for nearly two and a half millennia? (In what follows, I shall call this 'The Inevitable Question', for the sake of brevity.) The easiest answer to this question scholars can offer to non-scholars is to say that each generation of scholars must reinterpret the Greeks in terms that are accessible to their own generation, and hence, that our discoveries are often simply discoveries of ways to make yet another generation appreciate the wisdom of the ancients. (I shall henceforth call this 'The Easy Answer'.)

The problem is that even if The Easy Answer should turn out to be true, it is not (or not usually) what scholars *think* they are doing when they work. Scholars generally think they are discovering—or at least are attempting to discover—some truth or truths about the text, truth or truths their scholarly predecessors to some degree or other failed to see clearly. Scholars who believe this are thus *realists* about the interpretations they offer: they regard their results as succeeding only in so far as they describe some objective state of affairs or states of affairs—the way things really are (or were) in regard to the texts the scholars seek to explain. But, more importantly, they are also *progressivists* about scholarship—in contrast to those who might accept The Easy

© Nicholas D. Smith 1992

I am indebted to Thomas C. Brickhouse, Richard Burian, Julia Driver, David Halperin, James Klagge, Mark McPherran, and William Williams for reading and criticizing an earlier draft of this Afterword. None of them may be assumed to agree with my thesis, or even with my representation of the problems I address.

Answer to the Inevitable Question, scholars typically think that we make progress, from generation to generation, in our understandings of ancient texts. Accordingly, I shall call this 'The Progressivist Answer' to The Inevitable Question: we are still somehow making progress in coming to understand the ancients or their texts, understanding them in ways which are somehow demonstrably superior to the ways our predecessors understood them. But this is problematic, for scholarship almost never stands up to the scrutiny of subsequent generations of scholars. If we are really making progress, why does each generation inevitably fail to achieve the understanding for which they seek, according to the next generation of seekers? Our endeavours to catch hold of the truth we think we pursue always seem, in retrospect, remarkably futile.

In what follows, I shall consider some reasons for rejecting what I have called The Easy Answer and attempt to articulate precisely what assumptions lie behind The Progressivist Answer. I shall argue that The Progressivist Answer presupposes not only that there are genuinely discoverable objective states of affairs to which the scholar directly refers in his or her work (e.g. truths about the ancient texts, ancient authors' intentions or meanings), but also that there are rationally defensible principles which somehow constitute or at least warrant various principles of interpretation—normative judgements about how we *ought* to interpret texts and contexts, judgements that tell us how best to go about discovering the relevant truths about the texts and authors we study. I make no secret of my sympathies with The Progressivist Answer, but some may find the assumptions to which I shall call attention absurd, and will thus reject the very position I am inclined to defend. I shall not, in this Afterword, actually defend The Progressivist Answer.<sup>1</sup> Rather, I shall attempt only to articulate clearly the nature of its assumptions.

<sup>1</sup> I do not pretend, in what follows, to provide any particularly novel insight. The study of hermeneutics, represented especially in the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer (see esp. *Truth and Method*, English trans., 2nd edn. [London, 1979]), involves a much more comprehensive and detailed attempt to raise and answer the questions I shall consider here. Gadamer rejects the possibility of the sort of unprejudiced understanding I take the 'Progressivist' to seek. Although I do not agree with Gadamer's answers, I make no attempt to provide a detailed reply to them herein. I wish only to call fresh attention to some of the paradoxes and problems of interpretation and professional scholarship, from a point of view sympathetic to what I have identified as 'The Progressivist Answer'. A far more sophisticated defence of a position like the one I am calling 'The Progressivist Answer' is offered in E. D. Hirsch's *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago,

## 2. Problems with The Easy Answer

To give The Easy Answer to The Inevitable Question, one must pre-suppose one of two things: either one must regard each generation of scholars as understanding the ancients essentially correctly, or one must be essentially nihilistic about our capacity to achieve any genuine understanding of what the ancient philosophers themselves really thought. On either assumption, every generation of scholars understands the ancients equally well: on the first assumption, each generation of scholars equally succeeds in understanding the ancients, and on the second assumption, each generation of scholars equally fails to understand the ancients (for the nihilist regards such understanding as impossible).

The advantage of the first assumption is that some scholarly enterprises do seem to require periodic updating even in cases where no one supposes that there was anything intrinsically wrong with prior efforts. To some degree *translation* works in this way: each generation needs new translations of the ancient materials not because the old translations were all bad translations, but rather because translations become obsolete as our own language changes. Many nineteenth-century scholars were perfectly competent readers and translators—every bit as good as we are; but their translations are not as good *for us* as twentieth-century translations are, for one of the most important standards by which we measure the success of a translation is a *changing* standard—one provided by the styles, denotations, and connotations of the changing language into which the translator seeks to translate the Greek texts.

Of course, on the second (nihilist) assumption about scholarly

1978). Another illuminating discussion of some of these problems may be found in ch. 2 of Ronald Dworkin's *Law's Empire* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986); I found Dworkin's distinctions between 'conversational' and 'constructive' interpretation (on pp. 50–65), and between 'internal' and 'external' scepticism about interpretation (on pp. 76–86), particularly edifying. I am not attempting to represent or to reply to either Hirsch's or Dworkin's views here, however.

Some readers may also detect a number of similarities between this problem and certain problems in science, to which our attention has been called by various historians and philosophers of science. I admit to conceiving of my problem with this parallel in mind, though I shall make no systematic attempt to explore the similarities and differences I am inclined to find between the scholar and the scientist. Those interested in the parallels to the problem of scientific progress might consult the varieties of opinion represented in the works of Ronald M. Giere, Thomas S. Kuhn, Imre Lakatos, Larry Laudan, and W. V. O. Quine.

interpretation, there is nothing particularly objective to evaluate about former scholars' achievements. We might ask if they succeeded or failed in speaking in appropriate ways to their contemporaries, but we would have no reason to ask if they succeeded or failed in *understanding* the ancients' philosophical texts correctly—after all, on the nihilistic conception of scholarship, we have no reason to suppose we could ever genuinely understand the ancients anyway.

But few contemporary scholars regard the interpretations of earlier scholars as beyond appropriate criticism. When one reads an older work of scholarship, one finds that some of the predecessor's claims seem to be correct; but some seem incorrect. So, in offering our own interpretations, we do not simply seek to do for our generation what nineteenth-century scholars did for theirs, because we regard much of what they did for theirs as mistaken and wrong-headed. According to us, they simply did not understand correctly what they were interpreting, measured not against their own or our generation's peculiar standards, but measured against standards we regard as changelessly appropriate for all scholars at all times.

On either version of what I have called The Easy Answer, the standards of scholarship turn out to be fully relativistic—they change with each generation as do tastes and styles. If we look at what scholars say about the work of their predecessors, moreover, it seems perfectly obvious that they reject such relativism. It seems overwhelmingly apparent that most scholars regard themselves and their colleagues (from any generation) as attempting to figure out what exactly a given philosopher meant by saying and writing the things he or she said and wrote.

Now few of us actually think that each generation or each scholar figures this out perfectly well. Nor do we regard our predecessors and ourselves as equally incapable of discovering the truth of the matter. Each generation does learn from the last; but each generation also struggles to overcome the confusions and biases, the blind spots and inattentions, and the distorting interests of its predecessors. As Gail Fine's and Julia Annas's papers in this volume show, even the ancients' own understandings of other ancients' texts and arguments may be found susceptible to such distorting influences. We face all these same influences and many more besides: because the philosophies expressed in the ancient texts are often extremely subtle and intricate, and because they are often founded upon or influenced by an incredible variety of prejudices and agendas specific to the ancient

Greeks, and alien to the scholars of any subsequent generation, there is virtually no limit to the number of ways in which scholars have gone wrong and will continue to go wrong in their attempts to understand the texts they study.

Accordingly, we do not ordinarily conceive of our job as being simply to recodify for our own generation (or the next) the knowledge our predecessors had of the ancients; nor do we think of our work as purely creative and ungoverned by any pertinent objective truths. Instead, we try to overcome and transcend the hosts of misconceptions and follies with which our scholarly forebears have infected us. And the next generation will have to struggle to free themselves from our errors and distortions. But each generation regards itself as attempting to represent correctly and accurately the actual thoughts of the ancients and the meanings of their texts. But why, then, do we never seem to get it right, in the eyes of the next generation of scholars?

### 3. A hermeneutical parable

One of the difficulties of the scholarly enterprise may perhaps be illustrated by the familiar story of the three blind men who experience an elephant for the first time. One, feeling the trunk of the elephant, concludes that this beast is something like a snake; another feels the side of the elephant and the third feels the leg, each drawing predictably different conclusions. The problem of interpretation here is lack of scope—none of the blind men puts himself in a position to detect the varieties of ‘elephantness’; each jumps to a conclusion based upon his own limited experiences.

We might be tempted to suggest that the solution to their problem might be for each of them to exchange places with both of the others before they draw their conclusions. This might indeed help the three to reach a consensus about the elephant, but in a way they might be worse off after reaching their consensus than they were before it. Having reached a consensus, they might be tempted to regard the topic as closed—the project of understanding as completed, when not one of them has yet had any experience of the tusks, the tail, or the ears of the elephant, to say nothing of its internal organs, evolution, genetic, molecular, or atomic structures. In order to discover any more about the elephant, they will have to be convinced that more questions

are in order, that there are more parts to be discovered and examined. *Before* they had a consensus, they had strong grounds for supposing that further study was necessary. Once they *reach* a consensus, they are in danger of losing interest and going on to another project.

An exact parallel to this parable may be found in the history of scholarship. Scholars do in fact tend to focus their attentions upon one text or another, one set of passages or another, one set of issues or another, and generate their interpretations accordingly. Like the blind men in the original image, such scholars find other perspectives altogether bizarre unless such perspectives make claims specific to the texts, passages, or issues they have focused upon. But the history of scholarship is also filled with false moments of consensus, when the issues are plainly articulated, and the models by which such issues are to be understood have been formed to the satisfaction of the scholars themselves. After consensus has been reached, the entire area of scholarship just goes dead—no further questions are asked; whole works and authors are not discussed for years.

The key to discovery, then, is either an environment in which there is controversy between scholars, or else some other encouragement for generating new questions. Once new questions are asked, scholars will predictably generate controversies about how to answer them—especially if they come from somewhat different points of view to begin with.

#### 4. How scholarly questions actually get answered

But scholars live in a competitive environment in which controversy is always regarded as a kind of contest. There must be winners and losers, and the referees for our main events inevitably come from a very small class of academics, who have their own vested scholarly and other professional and personal interests in judging winners and losers. Those within the *élite* can evade their critics effectively simply by refusing to acknowledge controversies generated by those with lower status in the profession. Younger scholars and those labouring at less prestigious institutions must clamour for attention; their work can be entirely nullified, however, by simple neglect. Lesser lights would not be permitted to publish work that did not acknowledge the published views of the *élite*; the *élite* themselves are permitted Olympian disdain for the work of those with lower status.



The system of academic 'stars' and lesser lights effectively ensures that scholars of high status will maintain their status through constant citation of their work, regular involvement in controversy, and guaranteed occupation in the refereeing process for new work in the field. This same system also permits brilliant and troubling work by scholars of lower status to disappear quietly. Famous scholars are thus effectively enabled to decide when and on what topics they will allow controversies to develop. Notoriously, many choose not to engage in controversies that would threaten their status or overturn their most cherished views. And many also choose not to engage in controversies with others who are outside their own professional group—younger or less famous scholars not educated by or in some other way indebted to the famous scholar him- or herself or one of the famous scholar's famous friends.

One product of this stratification of scholarly society is that many potentially edifying controversies are suffocated before they can become matters of general discussion. Consensus is all too often reached, instead, through neglect. Even when controversial views are published by scholars of lower status, other scholars of lower status may find it prudent either to target such work for criticism (thus winning the approval of those with the most power in the profession), or at least not to express any agreement with or admiration for the work of those who might upset the established hierarchy. But since controversy is essential to discovery in our field, it turns out that the most famous scholars with the highest status in the profession often tend to act in such a way as to deter valuable scholarly discovery.

### 5. A second hermeneutical parable

Consider the old 'trick question' joke: Have you stopped stealing hub-caps? Do you still beat up your mother? It is not much of a joke, but it shows something interesting about questions: the very way in which we articulate questions betrays certain assumptions about the way the world is, or the way the question should be answered. The assumption that formulates the 'trick question' is flawed—the joke works by presumptively enforcing unacceptable limits on what will qualify as a proper answer: have you stopped stealing hub-caps or do you still steal them? Here is another trick question: What is the meaning of life? Here is another, related one: If there is no God, how can life have any meaning?

The history of philosophy has been more successful at pointing out the folly of such perennial, but presumptuous, questions than it has been at answering them. But then, if they are trick questions, the only answers allowed within the presumptions lying behind them are false. Now, of course, not all of the questions that scholars ask ancient texts to answer are trick questions. But scholars none the less almost always do ask questions based upon their own preoccupations—and insist on answers from the ancients in terms of those preoccupations. *Of course* this is anachronistic, but the obvious anachronism has not prevented all kinds of fads in modern scholarship. This century alone has seen Marxist interpretations of almost everything, Freudian interpretations, structuralist, deconstructionist, Straussian, and all manner of other (to my mind) misguided novelties. The texts themselves are never so tortured as they are by someone coming at them with an ‘ism’ for an instrument.

But I think all scholars are guilty—to some degree or other—of asking anachronistic questions as a result of attending too much to their own preoccupations, or by interpreting the texts in such a way as to make them say something pertinent to some contemporary issue. To some degree, this is an artefact of the interpreter’s own specialized training and professional position: philosophers are by training and inclination likely to look for issues of contemporary philosophical interest; philologists will look for literary elements; political scientists pay special attention to political issues. We see these differences in this collection of essays: surely even if all of our contributors are seeking the truth about their texts, they seek it in very different ways.

I am not denying that we can find the pursuit of certain anachronistically conceived issues stimulating and edifying: we might well wonder what Plato *would* have said about some contemporary issue. Questions of this sort are not trick questions because they do not simply *presuppose* that Plato had opinions on the subject. We can never really answer such questions, however, even if we find that there are clear entailments from what Plato does discuss to the issue in question. For we cannot be sure that Plato would not revise his other views in the light of these entailments, precisely to avoid the conclusion to which his other views would otherwise drive him. So questions of this sort are merely *futile*.

We might, however, only claim that the views Plato does express have some clear entailments regarding the contemporary issues, without attributing the result to Plato. But as useful as such logical

exercises are for philosophers, in deciding whether or not we should accept some Platonic position, they are of no use in determining precisely what Plato's views were. If we are going to understand Plato and Aristotle correctly, we must not assimilate their actual views to 'Platonism' and 'Aristotelianism'. In my experience, when scholars become too eager to trace entailments in this way they tend to become rather careless about getting the original philosopher's actual views right, for their attention to the contemporary issue tends to distract them from the ancient's point of view.

The anachronistic tendencies of scholars are encouraged, moreover, because virtually all of us are hired by other academics who do not particularly share our interests or expertise. We increase our chances of appealing to those who hire and fire us by shaping our enquiries in such a way as to conform to these others' (non-scholarly) interests. Such prudent approaches to ancient texts, however, do not necessarily lead to genuine discoveries or even to serious scholarly enquiries. They may, moreover, incline us (*pace* Marc Cohen's and David Key's very interesting and troubling paper in this volume) to employ the so-called 'principle of charity' in ways that ensure anachronistic inaccuracy.

Examples of such behaviour abound. If contemporary epistemologists come up with some new way of looking at knowledge, we can be sure that some scholar somewhere will attempt to show that the same theory may be found in some text of some ancient. Almost always, this cart-before-the-horse approach deserves the scrap-heap, and that is where virtually all such scholarship eventually ends up—forgotten by serious scholars no less than by those who are busy going off on the latest fad. But in the mean time the faddist may find him- or herself being offered academic positions and other professional advantages in preference to his or her more sober scholarly colleagues, precisely because our non-scholarly colleagues are less impressed by scholarly sobriety than they are by demonstrations of relevance to their own preoccupations.

What I have said so far helps to explain one of the most troubling problems for The Progressivist Answer, a problem that is rarely discussed by scholars themselves: few works of scholarship ever survive the ages intact. Many of those that might appear to do so—e.g. Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*—do so for reasons other than the perceived accuracy of their claims. One reason our work does not survive is not because all scholarship is inherently faddish in the silly

ways I have identified, but rather because, as I said before, we scholars tend to focus on the issues that interest us even when we try very hard not to get caught up in fads.

## 6. Another attempt to give The Easy Answer

It does not follow from any of the problems I have noted that there are no truths about the texts to be discovered, or that we cannot make any progress in the attempt to discover them once and for all. But it turns out that the issues concerning which we are inclined to look for these truths tend to change from generation to generation. Accordingly, one reason scholarship tends to become *passé* is just that the problems that interest one generation of scholars do not much interest the next generation, who ask new questions, and thus search for new truths which the past generation might only poorly have conceived, if they conceived them at all.

One might argue that this is what makes The Easy Answer correct after all. According to this version of The Easy Answer, different generations look for different sorts of truths in the texts, and are roughly equally good at finding them. The reason we reject our predecessors' interpretations is not because they are simply wrong, and not because they cannot possibly be right, but rather because what is right about them is just not of interest to the next generation of scholars, who are looking for different truths or sorts of truth. This is a variation of the non-nihilistic assumption behind The Easy Answer—each generation does understand the ancients correctly; the sort of understanding achieved, however, is simply not of interest to following generations.

I think this answer is at least partly mistaken. We do often come to the texts with different questions from those brought to them by our predecessors. But we do not always do so. Those of us who read and criticize our predecessors' work do not always regard such work as lacking what we take to be the most interesting focus or as failing to ask or answer the most interesting questions. In fact, we often take ourselves to have exactly the same interests and to be asking exactly the same questions as our predecessors. So we often criticize and find fault with our predecessors in exactly the same way and on the same terms as we do with our contemporaries, whose supposed errors do not appear to us to be motivated by different preoccupations or

questions. Accordingly, we do not—or do not always—regard our predecessors as understanding the ancients perfectly well according to their own intellectual standards and interests. Because we often—and I think correctly—think of ourselves as having the very same standards and interests as our predecessors, our rejection of their work does not always simply reflect a change of interests. And even when we do ask different questions, our approach may reflect an appropriate judgement as to what sorts of questions must be asked and answered in order to come to the precise sort of understanding our predecessors sought, but failed to obtain.

### 7. Interpretation as a normative enterprise

Why, then, are we rarely—if ever—able to get to the truth of the matter? Why is each generation of scholars so certain to discard the best efforts of the generation before it? To some extent, I have already given my answers: it is because we tend to conceive of the issues in too narrow a way; because we tend to focus on and be focused by the points of view promoted by those with the highest status in the profession; because we get caught up in interpretative fads; and because we tend to ask only questions that reflect our own narrow preoccupations or interests, or the preoccupations or interests of our non-scholarly colleagues.

But there is an additional factor that I have not yet discussed: I think that there is an inherently normative aspect to scholarship. Scholars provide interpretations of the texts, perhaps in the light of what are called 'contexts', that is, certain other facts about the texts, their authors, or the audience for whom the texts were written. But interpretations always do more than merely state the facts of the matter: scholarly interpretations rely on principles of interpretation that tell us how we *ought* to interpret the texts we study. The conclusions scholars reach are never entirely determined by the facts alone. Even if some interpretations can be shown to fail because they do not or cannot account for all of the facts, it is nevertheless true that the textual and contextual facts never fully determine how we should interpret them. If the texts and contexts alone were sufficient, interpretations would not be needed. So the texts and contexts provide the factual basis for interpretation, but do not direct us or prescribe what would constitute a correct interpretation without

additional principles which tell us what to do with the facts we are given.

These principles of interpretation are themselves not at all decided by the texts or contexts to which they are applied. Even where we can determine some of the principles of interpretation an ancient author himself accepts, it does not automatically follow that we must apply those and only those principles in our own interpretations. Plato's own case provides an excellent example of why this is so. No modern author would employ the principles which seem to motivate Plato's Socrates' interpretation of the poems of Simonides (at *Prot.* 339A 6–348A 6), or his many unlikely interpretations of Homeric lines in the *Republic* and elsewhere. So even where principles of interpretation are plainly stated or obviously employed within a text, it is a separate step to apply such principles to the text that states them—a step we might find we had good reasons not to take. Plato himself famously calls attention to the problem of interpretation at *Prot.* 347E 3–7 and at *Phaedrus* 274C 5–275E 5. If Kosman's or Halperin's papers in this volume are at all right, Plato also calls attention to the problem of interpretation in the *Republic* and the *Symposium*. Plato's scepticism about our ability to make texts speak clearly to us is exactly correct.

The result of this gap between the texts themselves and the principles by which we interpret them is that we cannot expect all differences of opinion between serious scholars, who are sincerely and sensitively attempting to discover the truth of the matter, to be settled just by an appeal to the texts or contexts. Principles of interpretation are formed in order to achieve a variety of goals which are rarely explicit, rarely complete, perhaps often inconsistent and without clear priorities among them, and which therefore rarely provide clear procedures for reaching a decision.

What I have called 'The Progressivist Answer' to The Inevitable Question is also a realist answer, as I said earlier, in so far as it assumes that there is (or was) some objective state of affairs—some objective meaning of the text—to be discovered. This claim is itself controversial, but even scholars who agree to it in general will often disagree about what exactly may be counted as constituting the relevant objective meaning. Moreover, scholars will not agree about what set of principles—in what hierarchy of importance and preference-order—are best used in the attempt to bring these meanings or intentions to light. This is because the principles of interpretation are normative principles, which are not themselves settled

by appeals to such things as objective meanings. One can also be a realist or progressivist about normative principles, of course, but it is worth noting that such positions involve appeals to entirely distinct 'objective states of affairs', or to sorts of intellectual progress very different from the positions I have described as realism or progressivism regarding interpretation.<sup>2</sup>

#### 8. Some genuine advantages we have over our predecessors

In fact, we can identify a few aspects of scholarship that give distinct advantages to contemporary scholars. A number of advantages we have derive from advanced technology. One outstanding example of this advantage is the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*. The *TLG* gives us, collected on a CD-ROM disc, all of the ancient Greek texts. A complete computer search of all of these texts for certain terms or combinations of terms takes roughly thirty minutes. A complete list of all of *Plato's* uses of a certain term can be performed in perhaps three or four minutes. Some nineteenth-century scholars devoted their entire lives to studies of the sort we can now perform before lunch. So advanced computer technology gives our generation a tremendous advantage—as more scholars get access to the *TLG*, we can expect

<sup>2</sup> The position of normative realism is given closest scrutiny regarding moral judgments. An excellent survey of a number of positions on this issue may be found in Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (ed.), *Essays on Moral Realism* (Ithaca and London, 1988). The fact that interpretation is guided by normative principles does not distinguish it from scientific enquiry, moreover, which also requires methodological commitments of a distinctly normative form. In order to be a complete interpretative or scientific realist, one must in fact be a realist about two distinct sorts of objects: those about which one speaks in scientific or interpretative discourse (natural facts, for example, or authorial intentions), and those which constitute or determine which scientific methodologies or principles of interpretation are appropriate to the scientific or interpretative enterprise. It is possible to be a realist about one of these sorts of objects—e.g. natural facts or authorial intentions—and not to be a realist about the other sort—e.g. those taken to constitute the methodological norms. So even a nihilist could allow that Plato actually had intentions (for example); the nihilist may only insist that, in principle, we cannot possibly discover what those intentions were. To be a progressivist regarding interpretation, moreover, one need not be a realist regarding methodological norms—one need only suppose that there are rational warrants for preferring one set of norms over another, and thus one interpretation over another, according to which some progress towards achieving a successful understanding of the ancients or their texts may be detected. These rational warrants need not be constituted by some objective states of affairs; they must only be construed as rationally defensible as appropriate standards for the sorts of judgements one makes in offering an interpretation, in preference to all other possible standards.

fewer errors of a certain sort by scholars who, like the blind men with the elephant, drew conclusions without having all of the pertinent resources at their disposal.

We also enjoy other technical advantages over our predecessors: our libraries routinely have far greater resources than those available to scholars even a few decades ago. Our access to texts, commentaries, and scholarly interpretations is vastly greater than it has ever been before. The same can be said for communications between scholars across oceans and continents.

Finally, we have many more professional scholars involved in our controversies than did our forebears. Only fifty years ago, it was common to see issues debated by no more than two or three scholars. Now, a hot issue can have scores of scholars working on as many points of view and contributing to the debate. This not only diminishes considerably the ability of any one clique of scholars to control—and thus, perhaps, to stifle—the scholarly enterprise, it also greatly increases the likelihood that the catastrophic errors and oversights will be weeded out over time.

#### 9. The best job we can do

But the fact remains that scholars are only as good as the questions and prejudices they bring to their texts. So perhaps the correct answer to The Inevitable Question should be that there is much left to do in our field precisely because scholars so often tend to interpret the ancients they love in ways that expedite and reflect their own interests. Such love is, indeed, blind; what is not clear is whether anyone can ever love the ancients with clear sight. But love we must: if we did not love our work and the texts we work on, we would hardly have become professional scholars. I have tried to argue that this very love can distort our perceptions and confuse our interpretations no less than blind hatred might do. Perhaps, as David Halperin suggests in his paper, Plato not only recognized the power of this force in the interpretative process, but also styled his dialogues in such a way as to quicken and focus the intellectually erotic impulses of his readers. Albeit by different means and without intending it, perhaps we are even now having the same effect on those who follow us: our errors will no doubt be more exciting than our successes. This is another paradox of The Progressivist View: if we ever truly succeeded in our



work, we would thereby eliminate our subject as an area for serious further inquiry. The great liveliness and variety of scholarly styles evident in this collection show how robust our field is. For Platonic scholarship to be as robust in the future as it is at present, we shall all, somehow or other, have to fail to convince our future readers. We leave them a better legacy if we annoy and trouble them with what they see as our failures.

*Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University*



## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Julia Annas is Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University. In addition to a number of papers on Greek philosophy, Annas has written *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford, 1981). She has co-authored and co-edited *Modes of Skepticism: Ancient Texts and Modern Interpretations* (Cambridge, 1985). She has done the Clarendon edition of Aristotle's *Metaphysics M and N*. And she is editor of *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*.

Mary Whitlock Blundell is Associate Professor of Classics at the University of Washington, Seattle. She is the author of *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies: A Study in Sophocles and Greek Ethics* (Cambridge, 1989); and of articles on Greek literature and philosophy.

S. Marc Cohen is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Washington. His articles on the theories and arguments of Plato and Aristotle have appeared in numerous philosophical journals. He has previously taught at Indiana, Berkeley, Rutgers, and Minnesota.

Gail Fine is Professor of Philosophy at Cornell University, where she has taught since 1975. She has published many articles, primarily on Plato's metaphysics and epistemology and on Aristotle's criticisms of Plato. She is now at work on a book on Aristotle's *Peri ideôn*.

Michael Frede is Professor of the History of Philosophy at Oxford. He has taught at Göttingen, at the University of California in Berkeley, and at Princeton. Frede has published mainly on ancient philosophy. His works include a monograph on Plato's *Sophist* (1968), a commentary, with G. Patzig, on Aristotle's *Metaphysics Zeta* (1988), and a book on Stoic Logic (1974). Some of his papers have appeared as *Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (1987).

David Halperin is Professor of Literature at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He is the author of *Before Pastoral: Theocritus and the Ancient Tradition of Bucolic Poetry* (Yale, 1983); and *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and other Essays on Greek Love* (Routledge, 1990).

David Keyt is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Washington. Keyt is a co-editor, with Fred D. Miller, jun., of *A Companion to Aristotle's Politics* (Oxford, 1990) and author of many articles on Plato and Aristotle.

James C. Klagge is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. He has published articles on moral philosophy, philosophy of mind, and the history of philosophy. He is currently co-editing a collection, with Alfred Nordmann, of Wittgenstein's shorter works.

Aryeh Kosman is the John Whitehead Professor of Philosophy at Haverford College. He is the author of a number of essays on Plato and Aristotle.

Kenneth Sayre is Professor of Philosophy at Notre Dame. Sayre is the author of *Plato's Analytic Method* (Chicago, 1969), *Plato's Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved* (Princeton, 1983), and numerous other books on a variety of topics.

Nicholas D. Smith is Professor of Philosophy at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Smith is co-author, with Thomas C. Brickhouse, of *Socrates on Trial* (Oxford and Princeton, 1989), and author or co-author of many articles on Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Smith is currently working with Brickhouse on a book about the philosophy of Plato's Socrates.

# INDEX LOCORUM

Alex. Aph.

*In Metaph.*

on 991<sup>a</sup>20–<sup>b</sup>8: 39n.

83. 18–22: 34n.

83. 22–6: 16

83. 25: 19n.

83. 25–6: 17

83. 26–8: 24

83. 28–30: 29

83. 30–3: 16

85. 21–88. 2: 31n.

86. 8–10: 35

86. 10: 35n.

86. 13–23: 32

217. 33–4: 19n.

228. 13–14: 19n.

228. 24: 19n.

Ammonius

*In Cat. Prooemium*

2. 17–3: 52n.

8: 52n.

Anaxarch.

72 B 1 DK: 166n.

Anon. *In Theaetetus*

54. 38: 52, 59

55. 8–13: 52

Anon. Neoplatonist commentator (ed.

Westerink)

pp. 205–6 (Hermann): 63

Antisthenes

fr. 51 (Caizzi): 142n., 144n.

Arcesilaus

see Cic.

Ar.

*Frogs*

1032–6: 142n.

*Wasps*

1174–5: 166n.

Arist.

*Cat.*

6<sup>a</sup>26–35: 28n.

6<sup>a</sup>37: 28n.

6<sup>b</sup>23: 28n.

7: 35n.

7<sup>b</sup>15 ff.: 38

14<sup>b</sup>11–13: 36

*De an.*

425<sup>b</sup>25–426<sup>a</sup>1: 38

*Metaph.*

A: 15

A 6: 17

A 9. 990<sup>b</sup>27–991<sup>a</sup>2: 23n.

A 9. 991<sup>a</sup>20–2: 39

11: 36n.

15: 38

29. 1025<sup>a</sup>6–13: 134n., 146

29. 1025<sup>a</sup>9–13: 161

Z 1: 21, 37

Z 12: 22n.

M 4: 17

M 9: 17, 29n.

N 1. 1088<sup>a</sup>21–<sup>b</sup>4: 35n.

*Meteor.*

4. 381<sup>b</sup>6: 88

*NE*

1. 6, 1096<sup>a</sup>11–16: 9n.

1. 6, 1096<sup>a</sup>20–1: 35n.

5. 1, 1129<sup>a</sup>11–16: 161

*Peri ideon*

see Alex. Aph.

*Phys.*

194<sup>b</sup>26: 39n.

*Po.*

1447<sup>a</sup>28–<sup>b</sup>19: 10

1461<sup>a</sup>21–3: 135n.

*Post. An.*

1. 4: 19

2. 13. 97<sup>b</sup>17–21: 142n.

*Top.*

117<sup>b</sup>12–25: 140n., 168n.

117<sup>b</sup>25: 142n.

140<sup>a</sup>7 ff.: 39n.

147<sup>a</sup>: 22

Aristox.  
*Harm.* 2. 30-1: 7n.

Ath.  
9. 505C: 9n.

Catull.  
16: 81n.

Cic.  
*De orat.*  
3. 32: 150n.  
3. 67: 45, 45n.  
3. 80: 45n.  
*Fin.*  
1. 2-3: 48n.  
2. 1-2: 50  
2. 2: 45  
5. 10: 45n.  
*Luc.*  
7: 48  
11 ff.: 59n.  
59: 46n.  
74: 44  
127: 48n.  
*ND*  
1. 11: 45n.  
*Tusc.*  
5. 11: 56n.  
*Varro*  
15 ff.: 58  
16: 44  
44: 44n.  
45: 44, 46n., 48  
46: 61n.

Democritus  
68 B 64 DK: 166n.  
68 B 65 DK: 166n.  
68 B 299 DK: 166n.

Dio  
52. 12: 169n.

D. L.  
3. 37: 3n.  
3. 51-2: 9n.  
4. 32-3: 47n.  
9. 72: 65n.

Diomedes  
*Ars grammatica* Bk. 3, 94n.

Euclid  
*Elements*  
i.25: 190n.  
i.241-2: 190n.  
i.242: 190n.

Eur.  
fr. 787 N2: 169n.

Heracleitus  
22 B 40 DK: 166n.

Hippias  
86 A 13 DK: 166n.  
88 B 4 DK: 154n.  
88 B 6 DK: 154n.

Hippon.  
38 B 3 DK: 166n.

Hom.  
*Il.*  
1. 17-42: 77  
1. 247-84: 142n.  
2. 336-68: 142n.  
2. 494-877: 150n.  
3. 202: 167n.  
3. 216-24: 152n.  
9. 52-78: 142n.  
9. 92-113: 142n.  
9. 308-13: 144  
11. 655-803: 142n.  
15. 412: 142n.  
18. 39-49: 150n.  
18. 105-6: 143, 169  
23. 304-48: 142n.  
*Od.*  
1. 1: 141n., 144n. (schol. on)  
3. 122: 167n.  
3. 126-9: 142n.  
3. 212: 153n.  
5. 228-61  
10. 330: 141n.  
11. 333-4: 152n.  
11. 368: 152n.  
13. 1-2: 152n.  
17. 486: 167n.  
17. 514-21: 152n.  
17. 518-21: 152n.  
19. 203-4: 152n.  
20. 17-18: 168n.

## Isoc.

1. 18: 166n.  
12. 18: 135n.

## Lactantius

- fr. 14b (Mette): 45n.

## Numenius

- fr. 25. 75-82 (des Places): 46n.  
fr. 26. 104-11 (des Places): 46n.

## Olympiodorus

*Prolegomena*

4. 20-5: 52n.  
6: 52n.  
*in Phd.*  
69D 5: 69n.  
72D 7: 70n.

## Philoponus

*In Cat. Prooemium*

2. 8-24: 52n.

## Plato

*Alc. I*

- 114D 1: 233  
121A: 142n.

*Alc. II*

- 147A-E: 167n.  
*Amatores*: 167n.

*Ap.*

- 19E: 165n.  
19E-20A: 141  
21B 4-5: 44  
21B-E: 153  
21B-23B: 133  
21C: 170  
21D 2-E 2: 164  
22A 6: 164  
23B: 153  
23B 4-7: 164  
26A: 156n.  
27A: 138n.  
28A: 157n.  
28C-D: 132, 168  
29D-30B: 138  
30A: 169, 179  
30B: 161  
31C 5: 170  
41B-C: 162n., 164n.  
41C 1: 164  
*Charm.*  
161B 1-2: 68

*Cri.*

- 44B: 168n.  
46B-C: 138n.  
47A-48A: 139  
47D-48A: 161n.  
49A-B: 58n.  
49D-E: 58n.  
*Epin.*  
991C 3: 233  
*Epist. II*  
314C 4: 83  
*Epist. VII*  
340C: 232  
340C 2: 232  
340D 3: 232  
340E: 232  
340E 2: 232  
341C 4-6: 230  
341C 6-D 2: 232  
341C 7: 232  
341D 1: 232  
342B 1: 242  
343A 1: 231  
343A: 231  
343C 2: 231  
343C 3: 231  
344A 3: 232  
344B: 232  
344B 5: 232  
344B 6: 232  
344B 6-7: 232  
344B 7: 232  
344B 7-8: 232, 234  
*Euthph.*  
5A-B: 153n.  
7D 8: 161n.  
8E 6: 161n.  
11B: 142n.  
11D: 157  
11E: 157  
*Gorg.*  
447B-C: 149n.  
447C-448A: 136  
449B-C: 149n.  
456C-457C: 148n.  
458D: 137  
461D-462A: 149n.  
480E 5-6: 161n.  
482B-C: 138n.  
483A: 153n.  
487B: 138n.  
490E: 138n.  
491B: 138n.

495 A: 138n.  
 497 B: 153n., 158  
 501 D-502 E: 151n.  
 504 A-505 B: 161n.  
 512 A-B: 161n.  
 513 B: 167  
 526 C: 169  
*Hipparchus*  
 229 E: 51  
*Hip. Ma.*  
 281 A: 138n., 167n.  
 281 A I: 138n.  
 281 A 3-B I: 167  
 281 A-B: 139, 167n.  
 281 A-282 E: 165n.  
 281 B: 138n.  
 281 B 5-6: 138n.  
 281 C: 138n.  
 281 C 2-3: 139n.  
 282 A: 136n.  
 282 B: 139  
 282 B-D: 138n.  
 282 D-E: 138n.  
 282 E 9-283 A 2: 138n.  
 283 B: 167n.  
 283 B-C: 138n.  
 283 B-284 C: 138n.  
 283 C 3-4: 138n.  
 283 C 3-5: 140n., 143  
 284 A I-3: 140n., 143  
 284 C 8: 139n.  
 284 E 4-5: 139n.  
 285 B 3-4: 139n.  
 285 C 7-D I: 136n.  
 285 C-E: 149n.  
 285 D 6-E 2: 139n.  
 285 D-286 A: 151  
 285 E: 150n.  
 285 E 10-11: 139n.  
 285 E 10-286 A 2: 167n.  
 286 A: 140n.  
 286 A-287 C: 138n.  
 286 B: 135, 141  
 286 D: 153n.  
 286 D 5: 138n.  
 286 E 5-287 A I: 138n.  
 287 A-B: 138n.  
 287 A 8-B 3: 138n.  
 288 A 3-5: 139n.  
 288 E: 140n.  
 289 A 5-6: 138n.  
 289 E 4: 139n.  
 289 E-290 A: 138n.

291 A: 150n.  
 291 A 7-8: 138n.  
 291 B: 154n.  
 291 D: 136n.  
 291 D-E: 143n.  
 292 B 7: 139n.  
 292 C I: 137n.  
 292 E: 168n.  
 292 E 4-5: 139n.  
 293 B 5-8: 68  
 295 A: 154n.  
 295 E-296 A: 149, 159  
 297 E: 154n.  
 298 B 5-6: 139n.  
 300 C: 154n.  
 301 B: 136n., 153n.  
 301 D: 154n.  
 304 A: 153n.  
 304 A-B: 140n., 148n.  
 304 C: 153n.  
 304 C 2: 164  
 304 C 3: 138n.  
*Hip. Mi.*  
 363 A I: 137n.  
 363 A I-5: 137, 141  
 363 A 2: 136n., 139  
 363 A 6-B I: 137n.  
 363 A 6-B 5: 158n.  
 363 B: 141n.  
 363 B I: 140  
 363 B I-4: 140  
 363 B 4-5: 140  
 363 B 5-C I: 140  
 363 B 6-7: 137n.  
 363 B 7: 140  
 363 C-364 A: 136  
 363 C I: 167  
 363 C I-3: 149, 151  
 363 C 2: 136n.  
 363 C 4-6: 158  
 363 C 7: 137n.  
 363 C 7-D 4: 136, 137, 138, 158  
 363 D 2: 136n.  
 364 A I-2: 136  
 364 A I-6: 138, 149n.  
 364 A 2: 138n., 139  
 364 A 3-6: 136, 139  
 364 A 7-9: 139, 153  
 364 A 8-9: 143  
 364 A 9: 149  
 364 B I-3: 140  
 364 B 2: 138n.  
 364 B 3-5: 140



- 364 B 5-8: 136  
 364 B 6: 136n., 157n.  
 364 B 7-8: 136  
 364 B 8: 136n.  
 364 B 8-9: 137, 141  
 364 B 9: 141  
 364 C 1: 137, 140, 141  
 364 C 2: 142  
 364 C 3-4: 137, 164  
 364 C 4: 138, 140  
 364 C 4-7: 141  
 364 C 5: 151n.  
 364 C 6: 142, 152, 166  
 364 C 8-D 1: 143  
 364 C 9: 157n.  
 364 D 3: 137, 137n.  
 364 D 3-6: 137, 138, 138n., 158  
 364 D 7-E 1: 143  
 364 D 8: 151n.  
 364 E 1-4: 144  
 364 E 2: 151n.  
 364 E 5-6: 144  
 365 A 1-B 2: 144  
 365 B 3-6: 144  
 365 B 7-C 1: 144-5  
 365 C 1: 151n.  
 365 C 1-2: 147, 154  
 365 C 3-4: 145  
 365 C 3-D 4: 151  
 365 C 6: 145, 147n.  
 365 C 7: 137n., 145  
 365 C 8-D 1: 145  
 365 D 2-4: 145  
 365 D 5: 153n.  
 365 D 6-8: 146  
 365 E 1: 147n.  
 365 E 2-4: 146  
 365 E 2-8: 146  
 365 E 2-9: 162, 170n.  
 365 E 3: 147  
 365 E 4-5: 152  
 365 E 8-9: 147  
 365 E 10-11: 146  
 366 A 2: 147n.  
 366 A 2-B 3: 147n.  
 366 A 4: 146  
 366 A 5-6: 145  
 366 A 6-8: 147  
 366 A 7: 146  
 366 A 8: 147n.  
 366 B 1: 146  
 366 B 4-5: 146, 147  
 366 B 7-C 4: 159n.  
 366 C 5-367 C 6: 146  
 366 C 5-367 D 2: 148  
 366 D 2-5: 143  
 366 D 3-5: 138n.  
 366 E 3: 155n.  
 367 A 2: 158n.  
 367 A 2-3: 155  
 367 A 3: 158n.  
 367 A 4: 138n., 158n.  
 367 B 2-3: 147n.  
 367 B 4: 147n.  
 367 C 7-D 2: 146  
 367 D 6-368 A 7: 148  
 367 D 6-369 A 2: 146  
 368 A 8-9: 148  
 368 A 8-369 A 2: 157  
 368 B: 136  
 368 B 2-3: 148, 151n., 152  
 368 B 2-5: 138n.  
 368 B 5-C 7: 149  
 368 B 7-C 1: 148  
 368 C 4-7: 149  
 368 C 5: 136n., 138n.  
 368 C 7: 153n.  
 368 C 8: 151  
 368 C 8-D 2: 150, 151  
 368 D: 155  
 368 D 2: 167  
 368 D 2-3: 150  
 368 D 4-5: 150  
 368 D 6-7: 150  
 368 D 7: 150  
 368 E 1-369 A 2: 150  
 368 E 3: 147n.  
 368 E 5: 152  
 369 A 2: 147n.  
 369 A 3: 150  
 369 A 4-8: 150  
 369 B 2-3: 146  
 369 B 3-7: 153  
 369 B 4-7: 146  
 369 B 7-C 5: 148  
 369 B 8-C 2: 153, 157  
 369 C 1: 153  
 369 C 2-8: 153  
 369 C 3-5: 154  
 369 C 4: 151n.  
 369 C 4-5: 170n.  
 369 C 6-8: 153  
 369 D-370 E: 149n.  
 369 D 1-E 2: 138n., 153, 165  
 369 D 5-E 2: 137n.  
 369 E 2-370 A 1: 153

- 370A 1-371C 5: 154  
 370A 2: 147n.  
 370D 5-6: 155  
 370D 6-7: 154  
 370D 6-E 4: 140, 143, 154  
 370D 7: 157n.  
 370E 1: 151n.  
 370E 2-3: 162, 170n.  
 370E 5: 157  
 370E 5-8: 155  
 370E 5-9: 154  
 370E 10-11: 156  
 371A: 147  
 371A 1: 156, 167, 170n.  
 371A 2-B 1: 154  
 371A 3: 154n.  
 371A 4: 151n.  
 371A 6-7: 158  
 371C 6: 155  
 371C 6-D 2: 154n.  
 371C 6-D 7: 154  
 371D 1: 155  
 371D 8-E 3: 154  
 371E: 158n.  
 371E 1: 155  
 371E 4-7: 156  
 371E 9-372A 2: 137n., 157  
 371E 9, 372A 3: 170n.  
 371E 9-372A 5: 156, 158, 160  
 372A 6-C 2: 138n.  
 372A 6-C 8: 165  
 372A 6-373A 2: 171n. ✓  
 372A 6-373A 8: 157  
 372B-C: 153n.  
 372B-373A: 149n.  
 372B 3-C 2: 157n.  
 372B 4-C 2: 158n.  
 372C 1: 158n.  
 372D 2-3: 157  
 372D 3-E 1: 157  
 372D 4: 158  
 372D 5: 170n.  
 372D 7: 158  
 372D 7-E 1: 164  
 372D 7-373A 5: 157n.  
 372D 8-9: 158n.  
 372E 1-373A 2: 157  
 372E 3-4: 157, 163  
 372E 6-373A 2: 149n., 161  
 373A 1: 158n.  
 373A 2-3: 149n.  
 373A 4-5: 169  
 373A 5: 170  
 373A 5-C 3: 158  
 373A 6: 158  
 373A 9-B 3: 158  
 373B 1-2: 158n.  
 373B 4-5: 157, 158  
 373B 6-9: 158  
 373B 7: 147n.  
 373C 1-3: 158  
 373C 2: 158n.  
 373C 4: 158  
 373C 9-374E 2: 159  
 373E: 160n.  
 373E 1-5: 160  
 374A 1: 159  
 374A 3-6: 160  
 374A 6: 159  
 374A 7-D 2: 159  
 374B 3: 159  
 374B 6: 160  
 374C 6-D 2: 161  
 374D 7: 159  
 374E 3-375A 7: 159  
 375C-D: 170n.  
 375C 2: 160  
 375D 1-2: 159  
 375D 3: 137n.  
 375D 3-4: 160, 170n.  
 375D 5 163  
 375D 5-7: 163  
 375D 7: 163  
 375D 8-E 1: 160  
 375E 1-376B 6: 160  
 376A 6-7: 161n.  
 376B 4-6: 51n.  
 376B 5-6: 161, 161n.  
 376B 7: 162  
 376B 8: 163  
 376B 8-9: 163  
 376B 8-C 6: 171n.  
 376C 1-6: 157n., 164  
 376C 3-6: 164  
 376C 4: 138n., 165  
 376C 5: 137n., 164  
*Ion*  
 530A-D: 136  
 530C 4: 145n.  
 530D: 136n., 142n.  
 533C: 136  
 535A 9: 126  
 536E-541B: 151n.  
 537A-B: 142n.  
 539E: 150n.  
 541D: 136n.

- 54I E: 167n.  
 54I E 4: 156  
*La.*  
 190E-191C: 53  
 192C-E: 26  
 193B-C: 53  
 196E-197C: 27  
*Laws*  
 72I B-C: 101  
 810E-811B: 151n., 167n.  
 819A: 167n.  
*Meno*  
 70B-C: 136n.  
 71D: 145n.  
 78E 6: 66  
 80C: 157  
 81A: 157  
*Parm.*  
 128E 6-130A 2: 31  
 132A 1-B 2: 179, 181n.  
 132A-C: 25n.  
 132D 2: 34n., 197  
 133B-134E: 20  
 135D 6: 223  
 136A 2: 223  
 136C 6: 223, 228  
 137B 7-8: 228  
 140B 6-8: 27n.  
*Phd.*  
 69D 5: 69n.  
 72D 7: 70n.  
 74: 15, 17  
 74B-C: 31n.  
 81E-82B: 169n.  
 82C: 169  
 94D: 168n.  
 100D: 34  
 101, 31  
 101E 3: 237  
 103E-104B: 20  
*Phdr.*  
 227A 1-5: 106  
 234D 1-6: 106  
 244A-245C: 121  
 258D 1-2: 104  
 261B-C: 142n., 152n.  
 261C: 142n.  
 263B 7: 241  
 264B 7: 124  
 264C: 134n.  
 264C 2-5: 124  
 265B 2-5: 121  
 266B: 241  
 267A 6-7: 139n.  
 267B: 136n., 165n.  
 279B ff.: 112  
 270B 1-272B 2: 104  
 274C: 230  
 274C 5-275E 5: 256  
 275A 2-3: 104  
 275A-B: 167n.  
 275D: 200  
 275D 1-2: 104  
 275D 4-9: 113  
 275D-E: 145n.  
 275D 9: 230  
 275D 9-E 2: 116  
 276A 1: 231  
 276A 2-3: 231  
 276A 5-9: 104  
 276A 8: 105  
 276A 8-9: 231  
 276C 3: 231  
 276E 6-277A 4: 117n.  
 277A 2: 116n.  
 277D 2: 231  
 278A 3: 231  
 278A 6: 104  
 278A 6-7: 105  
 278A 7-B 2: 105, 117  
*Phil.*  
 16A 8: 241  
 16A 8-B 1: 237  
 16B 5: 241  
 16C 5: 233  
 16C 6-7: 242  
 16C 7: 233  
 16D 8: 232  
 17A: 232  
 17D: 233  
 66A 5: 228  
*Pol.*  
 257C 9: 222, 228  
 258B: 240  
 265A 2: 241  
 266D: 241  
 266D 7: 223, 240  
 266E 1: 241  
 277A: 240  
 285D 6-7: 223  
 286D 9: 240  
 286D 9-E 1: 240  
 287C: 240  
*Prot.*  
 310A 2: 233  
 313A-314B: 139n.

- 315 C: 136  
 316 C 8: 142 n.  
 316 C-D: 136 n.  
 316 D-E: 142 n.  
 318 D: 136 n.  
 329 A: 200  
 329 A 2-B 1: 113  
 334 C-338 A: 149 n.  
 335 B 3: 233  
 335 B 5: 233  
 335 C 1: 233  
 335 C 4: 233  
 337 C-338 E: 153 n.  
 337 E 6-7: 138 n.  
 338 A: 139 n.  
 338 E-347 A: 135 n., 154 n.  
 339 A-347 A: 176 n.  
 339 A 6-348 A 6: 256  
 341 A: 142 n.  
 345 D: 176-7 n.  
 347 A: 154 n.  
 347 B-348 A: 145 n.  
 347 E 3-7: 256  
 347 E 5-7: 127  
 357 E: 157 n.  
 358 A-359 A: 165 n.  
 361 A-C: 138 n.  
*Rep.*  
 331 C: 26  
 332 C-333 A: 51  
 333 E-334 B: 51  
 334 A: 51  
 334 D: 51  
 337 D: 138  
 338 D: 153 n.  
 340 B 3-5: 66  
 341 A: 153 n.  
 358 B: 132  
 365 C 5: 143 n.  
 369 E-370 C: 167 n.  
 378 D 3-E 1: 145 n.  
 381 E 4: 167 n.  
 381 E 9: 167 n.  
 383 C 1: 161 n.  
 387 E-388 B: 168  
 389 E: 168  
 390 D: 168 n.  
 391 A-C: 168  
 391 C: 154 n.  
 392 Dff.: 75  
 392 D-394 C: 94  
 392 D 5-6: 94  
 393 A 6-7: 76  
 393 A 8ff.: 76  
 393 C 8-9: 94  
 393 C 11: 94  
 393 C 11 ff.: 76  
 393 C 11-394 B 1: 95  
 393 D 1: 94  
 393 D 8ff.: 77  
 394 A 7-B 1: 94  
 394 B 3: 94  
 394 B 6-C 2: 94  
 394 C 2-3: 94  
 394 C 3: 94  
 394 C 4-5: 94  
 394 D 5 ff.: 79  
 395 C: 132  
 396 C: 132  
 396 D-E: 132, 166  
 396 E 6ff.: 77  
 397 C 5: 167 n.  
 398 A 1: 167  
 399 E 10: 167 n.  
 414 B: 155 n.  
 431 B 9: 167 n.  
 433 A 8-9: 168 n.  
 433 D 1-5: 168 n.  
 434 A 9-B 7: 169  
 434 B 6-C 5: 168 n.  
 441 B: 168  
 443 C 8-D 3: 168 n.  
 444 B 1-5: 168 n.  
 444 C-E: 161 n.  
 472 C 4: 197  
 475 C-476 B: 167 n.  
 475 E 9-476 A 7: 31 n.  
 479 A-B: 68  
 481 D-E: 167  
 484 C 8: 197  
 485 A 10-B 3: 105  
 487 B: 153 n.  
 490 A 8-B 7: 105  
 493 A: 140, 165  
 493 D 1: 167 n.  
 498 C-D: 132  
 500 E 3: 34 n., 197  
 501 B: 131  
 501 D 1-2: 105  
 502 B: 5  
 505 A-B: 20  
 505 D-E: 122 n.  
 506 A: 20  
 506 B-D: 69  
 508 D-509 B: 20  
 509 B 7-8: 23 n.

- 515 D 5: 242  
 523-5, 31 n., 67  
 532 E 2: 241  
 533 C 9: 241  
 538 D 6-E 2: 66  
 540 A: 34 n.  
 540 A 9: 197  
 551 E 6: 169  
 551 E 6-552 A 2: 168 n.  
 557 C 1: 167  
 559 D 9: 167  
 561 E 3: 167  
 588 E 5: 167 n.  
 597 D 11 ff.: 89  
 598 B 8 ff.: 89  
 598 D-600 B: 151 n.  
 600 D 5-6: 136 n.  
 600 E 7 ff.: 89  
 601 A 4 ff.: 89  
 604 E 1-6: 167  
 605 A 2-6: 167  
 605 C 11-12: 89  
 605 C-D: 131  
 606 E: 151 n.  
 607 A: 132  
 607 B: 3  
 607 B 5-6: 128  
 620 B: 168 n.  
 620 C: 168  
 620 C-D: 169 n.  
*Soph.*  
 216 A: 222  
 216 C 3 ff.: 91  
 217 C-D: 222  
 217 C 3: 228  
 217 D 9: 233  
 219 D 4: 222  
 221 A 6-7: 222  
 221 A 8-B 2: 222  
 221 C 4: 222  
 223 E-224 C: 139  
 232 B-233 C: 167 n.  
 233 D-235 A: 151 n.  
 253: 221  
 253 E 1-2: 232  
 254 A 14-255 E 1: 31 n.  
 263 E: 218  
 265 D 8: 242  
 268 B 10 ff.: 91  
*Sym.*  
 172 A 1: 103  
 172 A 6-173 B 7: 107  
 172 B 3-5: 110  
 172 B 3-174 A 2: 99  
 172 B 4-5: 110  
 172 B 6: 113  
 172 B 6-173 A 8: 110  
 172 C 2-D 1: 113  
 172 C 4-6: 113  
 173 A 1-3: 113  
 173 B 1-4: 110  
 173 B 2: 114  
 173 B 3-4: 114  
 173 B 4-6: 111  
 173 C 1: 103  
 173 C 2-5: 108  
 173 C 3-4: 114  
 173 C 6: 107  
 173 D 1-E 3: 114  
 173 D 4-10: 107  
 173 E 5-6: 107  
 173 E 7-174 A 2: 112  
 174 A 4: 114  
 178 A 1-7: 110  
 179 E: 168 n.  
 180 C 2: 110  
 186 E: 142 n.  
 192 C-D: 122  
 192 E 9: 122  
 202 E 3-203 A 1: 101  
 202 E 3-203 A 4: 121  
 202 E 7-203 A 1: 121  
 203 D 1: 114  
 203 D 8-E 3: 101  
 205 B-C: 151  
 205 D 3-5: 112  
 206 B 9: 122  
 207 A 7-D 3: 101  
 207 B 7: 122  
 207 C 7: 122  
 207 D 2-3: 101  
 207 D 2-E 5: 101  
 207 D 2-208 B 6: 101  
 207 E 5-208 B 4: 102  
 207 E 7: 122  
 208 A 3-7: 102, 123  
 208 A 7: 102  
 208 A 7-B 5: 101  
 208 B 1-2: 101  
 208 B 2: 102  
 208 B 3: 102  
 208 C-D: 168 n.  
 208 C 4-209 E 4: 104  
 208 E 1-5: 101  
 208 E 1-209 E 4: 105  
 210 A 7-8: 105

210 C 1-3: 105  
 210 D 4-6: 105  
 210 E-211 B: 197  
 212 A 2-7: 104  
 212 A 5-7: 117 n.  
 213 D 8-E 6: 118  
 215 D 1-6: 105, 115  
 215 D 4: 110  
 220 B 6: 114  
 221 C: 142 n.  
*Theaet.*  
 142 C 7: 99  
 142 C 8-D 1: 99  
 142 D 1: 99  
 142 D 5: 99  
 143 B 5 ff.: 83  
 143 B 6-7: 99  
 143 B 7: 99  
 143 B 8-C 5: 99  
 150 C: 52 n.  
 150 C-D: 228  
 150 D 4: 233  
 150 D 7-8: 233  
 150 D 8: 233  
 151 A 2: 233  
 151 A 6: 233  
 155 E-157 B: 236  
 161 B: 64  
 171 D: 145 n.  
 173 B: 57  
 174 B-177 C: 56  
 177 B-C: 57  
 181 E 5-7: 66  
 182 E 10: 66  
 184-6: 56  
 184 E: 56  
 185 E: 56  
 189 E: 218  
*Tim.*  
 28-9: 34 n.  
 29 A 7: 238  
 29 B-D: 65 n.  
 29 B 4: 197  
 29 D 1: 238  
 31 A 4: 197  
 39 E 7: 197  
 40 D-E: 65 n.  
 48 E 5: 197  
 70 B-72 D: 121 n.

Plut.

fr. 1d (Mette): 45 n.

Mor.

711 B-C: 94 n.

*Table-Talk*

7. 8. 1: 94 n.

Procl.

*In Platonis Rem Publicam commentarii*  
 (Kroll)

14. 20: 79-80

14. 28: 82

Scholia on Pl.

*Epist.* 2. 314 C: 83 n.

Sen.

*Ep.* 65. 3: 88

Sept. Sap.

10. 3. a. 3 DK: 166 n.

Servius

Commentary on Virgil's *Third Eclogue*

introduction: 94

Sext. Emp.

*PH*

1: 49

1. 188-91: 66

1. 194-5: 69

1. 221-3: 71

1. 232-4: 46 n.

Simpl.

*In Phys.*

151. 6-11: 7 n.

310. 25-311. 27 (*ap. Alex. Aph.*): 39 n.

453. 25-30: 7 n.

Soph.

*Phil.*

94: 144 n.

421-3: 142 n.

Thuc.

1. 22. 2-3: 111

1. 71. 3: 166 n.

2. 37. 1: 166 n.

2. 40. 2-3: 166 n.

2. 41. 1: 166 n.

3. 37-8: 166 n.

3. 42-3: 166 n.

Xen.

*Mem.*

2. 1. 21-34: 136n.

4. 2. 1-5: 170

4. 2. 10: 136n., 150n.

4. 2. 19-20: 159n.

4. 4. 5: 167n.

4. 4. 6: 137n., 138n., 139n., 167n.

4. 4. 7: 140n., 148n., 152n.

4. 4. 8: 139n.

4. 4. 9: 139n.

4. 4. 11: 139n.

4. 4. 14: 140n.

4. 4. 19-20: 156n.

4. 6. 15: 152n.

*Symp.*

3. 6: 136n., 145n., 150n.

4. 6: 141n., 142n.

4. 6-7: 151n.

4. 62: 150n.

# GENERAL INDEX

- Academic sceptics 50, 56, 58, 60, 62, 68–72  
 Academy 6, 14, 41, 43–7, 61, 208, 213, 223–6, 228, 234  
 Ackrill, J. L. 34  
*ad hominem*, *see* argument, form of: *ad hominem*  
 Aeschines 9  
 Aeschylus 3  
 Alcibiades 9  
 Alexamenus 9  
 Alexander 15, 17  
 Allen, R. E. 25, 179, 186, 198–200  
 Ammonius 62, 69  
 anachronism, *see* interpretive principles: anachronism  
 analytic, *see* interpretation of Plato: analytic  
 Anaxagoras 44  
 Anaximander 175  
 Annas, Julia 9, 32, 38, 63, 66, 248  
 Anonymous, 6th cent. 52, 62–70  
 Anselm, St 75  
 Antiochus 58–9, 61, 71  
 Antisthenes 9  
 Anton, John P. 127, 145  
*aporia* (confusion, perplexity) 87, 118, 148–9, 157, 163–5, 199, 210–14, 222, 224–5, 233  
 appearance 90–2  
 Arcesilaus 43–62, 68, 71  
 Archilochus 74, 81  
 architecture 197–8  
*aretē* (virtue, excellence) 47, 54–5, 57, 104, 106, 110, 127, 140, 143, 159–62, 164, 172, 215  
   courage 26–7, 53–4, 162, 168  
   justice 26–7, 51, 160–2, 168, 215  
   as knowledge 160–1, 164  
   skill/craft analogy 47, 54, 160–2  
   *sôphrosunē* 91  
   wisdom 102, 134, 138–9, 141–3, 146–59, 164–9, 172, 232, 234  
 argument, form of:  
   *ad hominem* 46–60, 133, 147, 198  
   collection and division 110, 221–3, 233, 237, 240–1  
   dialectic 64–7, 104, 106, 108, 110, 112, 115–17, 124–9, 133–4, 137–9, 148–51, 154–6, 162–5, 169–72, 201–19, 221–3, 232, 241  
   *elenchos* 53, 60, 132–4, 137, 146–8, 155, 157, 163–7, 170–2, 210–14, 217–18, 222, 232, 234  
   enthymeme 174–200  
   *epagoge* (inference from examples) 159–60  
   hypothesis, method of 237, 241  
   arguments, Plato's use of 173–219  
 Ariston 58  
 Aristophanes 3, 6, 74  
 Aristotle 3, 7–11, 13–41, 74–6, 88, 146, 147, 161, 173, 178, 203, 208, 213, 253  
 Aristoxenus 7  
 Armstrong, D. M. 13  
 art 78–80, 88–90, 127  
 Asclepius 142  
 Augustine, St 1, 128, 203  
 Axiothea 226  
  
 Bacon, Helen H. 93, 97, 119, 127  
 Barnes, J. 7, 9, 43, 63, 66  
 beauty 101–2, 106, 110  
 Beethoven, L. van 239  
 being 90–2, 101, 123  
 belief 47–8, 50–2, 68, 236, 238  
   as a condition of *elenchos* 210–14, 217  
   popular moral beliefs 54–5, 137, 145, 149, 162–5, 168, 170, 217  
 Berger, Harry 93, 109, 117, 127  
 Berkeley, G. 1, 2, 86  
 Brennan, T. 144  
 Brentlinger, John A. 96, 100, 127  
 Brickhouse, T. 245  
 Brink, D. 13  
 Brown, L. 43  
 Browning, Robert 80  
 Brumbaugh, R. S. 236  
 Burian, R. 245



- Burnet, J. 155, 164  
 Burnyeat, M. 43, 44, 46  
 Caizzi, Fernanda Decleva 47  
 Calderini, A. 168  
 Calogero, G. 134, 138, 149, 155, 156, 158–61, 163, 170  
 care, *see meletē*  
 Carneades 56, 61  
 cave (image in the *Republic*) 239, 242  
 character traits:  
   *alēthēs* (true) 143–53, 155–6, 162, 170  
   *dunatos* (capable) 146, 148, 159  
   *panourgia* (unscrupulousness, villainy) 146, 150, 152  
   *polutropos* (versatile shrewdness) 141–6, 152, 162–3, 166, 169  
   *pseudēs* (false) 144–53, 157–8, 168  
   *see also aretē* (virtue)  
 characterization, Plato's use of 131–72  
   ethical models 132, 140, 152, 154, 160–1, 165, 168–9, 171–2  
   hero 104, 132–5, 140–4, 146–7, 152–72  
 charity, *see* interpretive principles:  
   charity  
 Cherniss, H. 14, 31, 32, 118, 186, 198–200  
 Cicero 61, 63, 65, 69, 70, 203  
 Clauss, J. 131  
 Clay, Diskin 127  
 Cleary, John J. 118  
 Cobb, B. 1  
 Code, Alan 43, 51  
 Cohen Avner 200  
 Cohen, S. Marc 12, 182–6, 253  
 collection (and division), *see* argument,  
   form of: collection and division  
 confusion, *see aporia*  
 consensus 249  
 consistency and inconsistency 33, 137–8,  
   149, 151, 158, 163–4, 169, 188, 203,  
   208, 211–12, 214, 216, 218  
 context 255–6  
 contradiction, *see* consistency and  
   inconsistency  
 Cook, Albert 74  
 Cornford, F. 52, 64, 99, 227, 236  
 Couissin, P. 46, 57, 68  
 Coulton, J. J. 197  
 Coventry, L. 133  
 craft analogy, *see aretē*: skill/craft  
   analogy  
 craftsmen 197–8  
 Cumming, A. 131  
 Curtius, E. R. 94  
 custom (*nomos*), *see phusis* (nature)  
 Cynics 44  
 Daedalus 142  
 Dascal, Marcelo 200  
 Dauenhauer, Bernard P. 109  
 deconstructionism, *see* interpretation of  
   Plato: deconstructionist  
 Dedekind's Postulate 194  
 definition 19–23, 27, 36–7, 52, 85, 222,  
   232, 237–8, 240–1  
 deliberate, *see* intentional  
 de Man, Paul 128  
 democracy 166–7, 172  
 Democritus 44  
 Denniston, J. D. 137  
 Derrida, Jacques 109, 111, 113, 117, 118,  
   124  
 Descartes, R. 1, 75  
 Desjardins, Rosemary 113  
 Devereux, Dan 13, 16  
 dialectic, *see* argument, form of: dialectic  
   dialogue form 3, 9–11, 60, 80–5, 93–100,  
   201–19, 223, 227, 233, 235, 238  
 Dickens, C. 73  
 didactic dialectic, *see* argument, form of:  
   dialectic  
*diēgēsis* (narration) 74–8, 81–7, 93–129,  
   152  
 Dillon, J. 59  
 Dion 5, 6, 226, 234  
 Dionysius 5, 6, 223, 234  
 divided line (image in the *Republic*) 238  
 divine 101  
 division (and collection), *see* argument,  
   form of: collection and division  
 Dobson, W. 3  
 Dodds, E. R. 122  
 dogmatism 45, 48–9, 55, 61, 67–71,  
   118–19  
 Donini, P. 43  
 Dostoevsky, F. 239  
 Dover, K. J. 81, 95, 98, 142  
 dramatic structure 8, 73–92, 96–100, 114,  
   119, 133–5, 201–2, 219  
 Driver, J. 245  
 Duchamps, Marcel 80  
 Dworkin, Ronald 247  
 Edelstein, Ludwig 5  
 education 56, 63–4, 134–7, 140–2, 145,  
   151, 153, 158, 164–72

- Ehrenberg, V. 169, 170  
*elenchos*, see argument, form of: *elenchos*  
 Elias 62  
 Eliot, T. S. 73  
 Empedocles 10, 44  
 enthymeme, see argument, form of:  
   enthymeme  
*epagōgē* (inference from examples), see  
   argument, form of: *epagōgē*  
 Epicurus 64  
*epochē* (suspension of judgement) 46, 66  
 equipollence, see *isostheneia*  
*erōs* (passionate desire) 93–129, 258  
 essence 65, 67  
 ethical mission of Plato 131–5  
 Euclid 189–96  
 Euripides 74  
 Everson, S. 23, 43  
 Eves, Howard 190  
 examples, Plato's use of, see argument,  
   form of: *epagōgē*  
 excellence, see *aretē*
- fallacy in Plato 85, 147, 152, 155, 203, 229  
 Ferrari, G. R. F. 111, 113, 119  
 fiction 124, 201–4, 214, 216  
   fictional character 73, 95, 204  
   fictional voice 73, 78  
   fictional world 79, 81, 111  
 Field, G. C. 9  
 Fielding, Henry 81  
 Fine, Gail 8, 43, 248  
 Finley, J. H. 144, 152, 164  
 Flashar, H. 136  
 forms, theory of 4, 7, 13–41, 67–9, 90–1,  
   178–87, 224–5, 229, 232, 235, 237,  
   240, 242  
   Form of Beauty 104, 127, 198  
   Form of the Good 23, 69–70, 202, 228,  
   230, 237, 239  
   Form of Unequal 29–31  
   opposites 29–31, 68  
   paradigm 32–4, 40, 197–8  
   participation 180–4, 199, 229, 236  
   'Pauline' predication 186–7  
   relatives 31–9  
   self-predication 17, 24–9, 180, 197–9  
   separation 17, 19, 29, 36–7  
   third man argument 25, 178–87, 197–  
   200  
   uniqueness 24–9  
 Frede, Michael 7, 10, 22, 44  
 Freeman, K. 135, 139
- Frege, G. 187  
 Friedlaender, P. 51, 142, 160, 170, 171
- Gadamer, Hans-George 120–2, 246  
 Gaiser, K. 7, 231  
 Gallavotti, Carlo 94  
 Gallop, D. 30  
 Geach, P. T. 28, 29, 186  
*genesis* (birth, becoming) 101–3  
 Giere, R. 247  
 Glidden, David K. 122  
 Glucker, J. 43  
 Gomperz, T. 134, 160  
 Gorgias 207  
 Gould, J. 161  
 Graeser, A. 20  
 Griffith, M. 131, 136, 137  
 Griswold, Charles L. 113, 116, 119, 235  
 Groden, Suzy Q. 96  
 Grote, G. 147, 149, 160, 163, 164  
 guardians (in the *Republic*) 67  
 Gulley, N. 133, 137, 157, 160, 161  
 Guthrie, W. K. C. 135–8, 140, 142, 145,  
   153, 157, 160, 161
- Hackforth, R. 102, 110, 113, 116, 124  
 Halleran, M. 131  
 Halperin, D. 245, 256, 258  
 Hamilton, Walter 103  
 happiness 7, 47, 54, 56–7, 161  
 Harlfinger, D. 15  
 Haslam, Michael 9, 94, 126  
 Havelock, Eric A. 94, 151  
 Hawtrey, R. S. W. 170  
 Hayduck, M. 15  
 Heath, M. 151  
 Heath, Thomas L. 190, 194  
 Hedrick, E. R. 190  
 Heraclides 7  
 Heraclitus 1, 2, 8–9, 45, 118  
 Hermann, K. F. 83  
 hermeneutics 84–6, 120–6, 246, 249, 251  
 hero, see characterization, Plato's use of:  
   hero  
 Hesiod 201  
 Hestiaeus 7  
 Hicks, R. D. 3  
 Hilary, Sir Edmund 12  
 Hippias of Thasos 135  
 Hirsch, E. D. 246, 247  
 Hirst, M. E. 169  
 historical evidence concerning Plato 4–  
   11, 208, 225

- Hoerber, R. G. 135, 139, 142, 144, 157,  
161, 166, 169, 171  
Homer 10, 76-8, 81, 87, 95, 131-72, 201  
Horace 74  
Hornsby, Roger 97  
Hume, D. 1, 2, 58, 75  
hypothesis, *see* argument, form of:  
hypothesis
- ignorance 44, 50, 127, 139, 157-8, 170,  
210, 215  
    *amathēs* (ignoramus) 155, 158  
image 88-91, 104, 117, 242  
imitation, *see* *mimēsis*  
immortality 4, 69-70, 102, 168-9  
inconsistency, *see* consistency and  
    inconsistency  
intentional 144-7, 156-62, 167-8  
intentions of Plato 11-12, 14, 83, 118-20,  
125-9, 195, 203, 225, 246  
interpretation of Plato:  
    analytic 1, 3, 11-12, 173-200  
    deconstructionist 12, 118, 126, 252  
    literary 12, 60, 86  
    performance view of dialogues 223-7,  
        234, 243  
    prospective 195-200  
    proto-essay view of dialogues 227-30,  
        243  
    retrospective 195-200  
    sceptical 43-72  
interpretive assumptions 245-59  
interpretive principles 245-59  
    anachronism 177, 188-9, 252-3  
    charity 174-200, 253  
    parsimony 188-9, 194-6  
Ioppolo, A.-M. 46  
irony 84-5, 100, 109, 118, 124-7, 138-9,  
143, 148, 150, 155-6, 162, 166, 170,  
227  
Irwin, T. H. 22, 132, 138, 140, 154, 160,  
161, 167-9  
*isostheneia* (equipollence) 66-8
- Jaeger, W. 136  
Jowett, B. 103, 158  
Joyce, Michael 103
- Kahn, Charles 96, 132, 133  
Kahn, M. H. 93  
Kant, Immanuel 75, 173  
Kennedy, G. 142, 152  
Kerferd, G. B. 135-8, 153, 166
- Keyt, C. 173  
Keyt, David 12, 253  
Kibel, A. 93  
Kierkegaard, S. 1, 2, 75, 139  
King, K. C. 140, 151, 168  
Kirk, G. S. 136  
Klagge, J. 93, 245  
Klein, Felix 190  
Kleiner, J. 93  
knowledge 38, 44, 47, 48, 52, 54, 63-5, 69,  
102-4, 111, 114, 140, 146, 148, 151,  
158, 160-1, 211, 214-19, 229-43, 249,  
253  
    self-knowledge 171  
Knox, B. M. W. 140, 166, 167  
Konstan, D. 93  
Kosman, L. A. 256  
Koyre, A. 133, 170  
Kraut, R. 157, 163, 164  
Kuhn, T. S. 247  
Kung, J. 21
- Labarbe, J. 144  
Lakatos, I. 247  
Laudan, L. 247  
lecture: 'On the Good', by Plato 7-8, 231  
Lee, E. N. 160  
Leshner, J. 43  
Leszl, W. 15  
letters attributed to Plato 5-6, 9, 83-4,  
86, 230-4, 239, 242-3  
literary aspects of the dialogues 73-172,  
201, 228  
    *see also* interpretation of Plato: literary  
literary genres 5, 10-11, 76-81, 89, 94,  
131-2, 136, 151, 207  
literature, philosophy and 2-3, 127,  
201-2  
*logos* 91, 103-5, 110, 113, 115-17, 147,  
218, 229, 231, 236, 238-41  
Long, A. A. 44, 46, 47  
Louis, P. 154  
Lowell, Robert 81  
Lowenstam, Steven 102  
Luce, J. V. 102  
Lucretius 1, 2, 75  
Lysias 106, 231
- McDowell, John 52  
McKeon, Michael 112  
Maconi, H. 63  
McPherran, M. L. 93, 132, 245  
Magee, B. 2

- maieusis* 221-43  
 Malcolm, Norman 2  
 Mann, William E. 179  
*manteia* (divination) 121-3  
 Mastronarde, D. J. 136  
 mathematics 4  
 Matthews, G. 173  
*meletē* (care) 102-9, 122  
 memory and forgetfulness 104-6, 109-12, 150, 155, 170-1, 230-1  
 Meyerhoff, H. 51  
 Miller, Mitchell 224-6  
 mime 10-11  
*mimēsis* (imitation) 73-92, 94-5, 125-6, 132, 140, 151, 156  
 Montaigne, M. 128  
 Moore, Marianne 90  
 Moravcsik, J. M. E. 161, 166  
 Moreau, J. 160  
 mortal 101-2, 116  
 Mourelatos, A. P. D. 160  
 Mueller, G. 161, 162  
 Mueller, Ian 190-2  
 Mulhern, J. J. 144-6, 160  
 Murdoch, Iris 2  
 myth of Er 168-9  
  
 Nagy, G. 140, 141  
 nature, see *phusis*  
 Nehamas, A. 103  
 Neoplatonists 62  
 Nietzsche, F. 1-3, 128, 253  
 Noble, C. A. 190  
*nomos* (custom), see *phusis* (nature)  
 North, H. 142, 167, 168  
 Numenius 43  
 Nussbaum, Martha C. 2, 15, 25, 93, 114, 168  
  
 O'Brien, M. J. 135, 160, 161, 168-70  
 Olympiodorus 62, 69  
 opinion, see belief  
 oral narrative 99, 102-3, 109, 111, 113-16, 150, 231-3  
 original 90, 117  
 Owen, G. E. L. 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 28  
  
 paradox 7, 18, 32-3, 109, 153, 160-1, 163, 174, 187, 258  
 Parmenides 1, 45  
 parsimony, see interpretive principles:  
     parsimony  
 particulars 29, 37, 91, 184  
  
 Patterson, R. 163, 185  
 Peano's Postulates 182-5  
 Pelling, C. 133  
 Penner, T. 160, 161, 187  
 Peripatetics 61  
 perplexity, see *aporia*  
 Peterson, Sandra 186-7  
 Pfeiffer, R. 135, 136, 166  
 Phillips, J. 144, 148, 155  
 Philo 44, 59, 71  
 Philoponus 62  
*phusis* (nature) 90, 140, 156  
 Platus 74  
 Plutarch 5, 6, 43, 45  
 poet, Plato as a 3, 73, 80-1, 89-90  
 poetry, Plato's attitude towards 75-9, 126-8, 131-2, 151, 167-8  
 Pohlenz, M. 134, 146, 148, 161  
 Polemon 45  
 political proposals in Plato 5-6, 9, 11  
 Preus, Anthony 127, 145  
 Proclus 192  
 procreation 101-5, 116-17, 122  
 progress in science 247  
 progressivism about interpretive  
     scholarship 245-6, 253-4, 256-9  
 prophecy, see *manteia* (divination)  
 Protagoras 62  
*psukhagōgein* (leading or guiding of the  
     soul) 84, 124  
 Pucci, P. 132  
 purposeful, see intentional  
 Pyrrho 46-7, 58, 62  
 Pyrrhonian sceptics 50, 62, 66  
  
 question-and-answer format 205-16,  
     227, 232  
 Quine, W. 247  
  
 reading 109, 122, 125, 128-9  
 realism about the object of scholarship  
     256-8  
 recollection, theory of 234-6  
 relatives 16-24, 29-39  
 rhetoric 106, 110, 113-15, 118, 124-5,  
     136, 148-9, 153, 198, 207-8, 229  
 Rickert, G. 1  
 Ritter, C. 134, 156  
 Robinson, R. 133, 159  
 Rorty, R. 44, 160  
 Rosen, Stanley 118, 121, 122  
 Rosenstock, Bruce 96, 102, 103  
 Rosenthal, David M. 200

- Rousseau, J.-J. 128  
 Russell, Bertrand 182  
 Rusten, J. S. 166  
 Ryle, G. 223-4, 226
- Santas, G. X. 146, 161, 173  
 Sartre, J.-P. 2  
 Saunders, T. J. 136  
 Sayre, Kenneth 8, 113  
 Sayre-McCord, G. 257  
 scepticism, *see* interpretation of Plato:  
     sceptical; Socrates: as a sceptic  
 Schleiermacher, Friedrich 3  
 Schmiel, R. 144  
 Schneewind, J. B. 44  
 Schneidewin, W. 168, 169  
 Schofield, M. 25  
 Sedley, D. 46  
 Sellars, Wilfrid 180-1, 186  
 sense-perception 238  
 sensibles 15, 20, 34, 36-8, 68  
 Servius 94  
 Sexton, Anne 81  
 Sextus Empiricus 65, 68, 69  
 Shakespeare, W. 74, 101  
 Shelley, Percy B. 103  
 Shields, C. 13  
 Shorey, P. 64  
 Sidney, Sir Philip 73-4  
 Simonides 150, 154, 176, 256  
 simplicity, *see* interpretive principles:  
     parsimony  
 Simplicius 7, 62  
 Skinner, Q. 44  
 Smith, Nicholas D. 1, 93, 127, 131, 173  
 Snyder, E. 93  
 Socrates: as a midwife 52, 59-60, 233,  
     235  
     as a sceptic 44-61  
     as a teacher 56, 63-4, 171  
 sophists, sophistry 45, 50, 90-1, 106,  
     134-43, 149-54, 157-9, 165-6, 171-2,  
     198, 235, 237, 240-1  
 Sophron 10  
 Sosa, Ernest 12  
 soul 4, 69-70, 101, 115, 121-2, 138, 149,  
     159, 161, 169-70, 218, 231-2, 234-5,  
     242  
 Speusippus 7, 226  
 Spinoza, B. 198  
 Sprague, R. K. 145, 147, 160, 161, 170,  
     171
- Stanford, W. B. 140, 144, 152, 166, 168,  
     170  
 Stannard, Jerry 121  
 Steinmetz, Peter 94  
 Stoics 44, 46, 61, 70  
 Stokes, M. 133, 135, 138, 154, 165  
 Strang, C. 186  
 Strauss, L. 252  
 Striker, G. 13, 50  
 structuralism 12, 252  
 style, philosophical writing 1-4  
 substance 13, 16-24  
 sun (image in the *Sophist*) 239
- Taran, Leonardo 118  
 Tarrant, D. 135, 136, 139, 143, 149, 153  
 Tarrant, H. 52  
 Taylor, A. E. 134, 161  
 teaching, *see* education; Socrates: as a  
     teacher  
 Thompson, W. H. 142  
 Thucydides 166, 207  
 Timon 47  
 Todd, R. B. 19  
 Trask, Willard R. 94  
 truth 47-50, 139, 171, 245-9, 254  
 Tweedale, M. 173
- universals 13, 23, 37  
 Untersteiner, M. 136, 166  
 unwritten doctrines of Plato 7-8, 41, 231
- ventriloquy, Plato's 75, 79  
 Verdenius, W. J. 135, 151  
 Vicaire, P. 134, 167  
 Virgil 94  
 virtue, *see aretē*  
 Vlastos, G. 19, 25, 26, 43, 59, 65, 93, 114,  
     131, 139, 144, 147, 157, 162, 164, 170,  
     179-82, 185-6  
 vocalizing 95, 109, 132  
 von Neumann set theory 183-4
- Waterfield, R. 136, 146, 150, 153, 158  
 Weiss, R. 143, 145, 146, 153, 156, 158,  
     164, 170  
 Westerink, L. G. 52  
 White, N. P. 13, 20  
 Williams, W. 245  
 Wittgenstein, L. 2, 173  
 Wolff, E. 132  
 Woodruff, P. 44, 103, 136, 139, 140, 150,  
     165

Woods, M. 21

Wordsworth, William 81

writing 104, 109, 111-17, 120, 125, 230-4

Xenarchus 10

Xenocrates 7

Xenophon 9, 115, 139

Yates, F. A. 150, 171

Young, C. 173

Zembaty, J. 145-7, 161